



Media release

SHANE RATTENBURY MLA

Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability
Minister for Justice and Consumer Affairs
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Mental Health
Member for Molonglo

22 November 2016

Dhulwa Mental Health Unit opens

People who have complex mental health needs will now have access to specialist treatment and rehabilitation services, following the opening of Dhulwa, the ACT's new secure mental health facility today.

ACT Minister for Mental Health, Shane Rattenbury, said Dhulwa, located in Symonston, would provide targeted individual care and treatment for people assessed as needing high levels of care and security.

"People with complex mental health issues who are, or may become involved with the criminal justice system need appropriate care if they are to have a chance at rehabilitation, and we need a continuum of care across the health and corrections systems," Mr Rattenbury said.

"This purpose-built facility will have 10 acute and 15 rehabilitation beds, and will be operated by specialist health and security staff, providing 24-hour clinical support and treatment in a safe environment."

Some of the services will include:

- Specialist forensic psychiatric care, mental health care, alcohol and drug treatment, dental care and primary health care
- Specialist behaviour management
- Support for spiritual and cultural needs
- Links to community services and groups to assist patients when they re-enter the community.

"The facility is also equipped to assist people in developing new skills and interests that support their rehabilitation, including gardening, exercise, art, music, social, cultural and vocational activities."

The facility will commence operations tomorrow, with patients being admitted in stages. ACT Health is anticipating up to seven patients in the facility by the end of the year, with the aim for these patients to be transitioned into the rehabilitation wing throughout 2017, making way for new patients to be admitted into the acute wing.

Mr Rattenbury said Dhulwa, which was part of the 2012 Parliamentary Agreement, was built on time and within budget, and bridges an important gap between the Territory's justice and health systems.

"While the ACT mental health care system provides a range of treatment options for adults, there has been a critical need for a secure facility to support those in need of more complex levels of care," Mr Rattenbury said.

"The ACT Government has invested more than \$43 million into the construction of Dhulwa, as part of a commitment to expand mental health services for Canberra's most vulnerable people.

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“In the past 12 months, 1,100 people were employed at Dhulwa during its construction phase, with 18 of those positions filled by Indigenous participants. The facility now employs over 60 staff to operate it.”

Mr Rattenbury said the wellbeing and rehabilitation needs of those needing care had been central to the design of Dhulwa.

“The design gives them as much privacy as possible, while still providing the supervision and care needed to ensure their safety and rehabilitation,” Mr Rattenbury said.

“At the same time, security is integral to the building’s design to ensure the safety of all those both within and outside the facility.”

Mr Rattenbury said much care had been taken to create a therapeutic and pleasant environment within Dhulwa.

“We have worked with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council to recognise the culture of the traditional custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people, and have incorporated Indigenous designs into the interior and landscaping features of the unit,” Mr Rattenbury said.

“The Council also gifted the name Dhulwa, which means ‘honeysuckle’, a plant with healing properties.”

Nature has also inspired the colour scheme, the artworks and the names of the three wings in the building.

The wings of the building are:

- *Lomandra* (green), commonly known as spiky-head mat-rush
- *Mallee* (purple), a eucalypt that has several stems rather than a single trunk and
- *Cassia* (yellow), which produces an abundance of yellow flowers in winter and spring.

Statement ends

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