

Bridging Sovereign Spheres through Professional Networks and Lively Publics in the Realm of Mental Health Policy

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1 Introduction

Beyond the formal constitutional grid of Australia's Federation is a somewhat hidden history of professional networks and mutual learning. In the realm of caring for the mentally ill, for example, professional exchanges both in terms of knowledge and manpower occurred frequently across state jurisdictions, and they still do.¹ Buttressed by professional organisations, such as the Royal Australian New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP),² normative and functional commonalities provided a basis for sharing and exchanging information about common problems in the mental health field. This is not to romanticise the brutality and dearth that has characterised Australian mental health policy and service provision from colonisation. Rather, it is to recognise a heritage of informal interconnections across Australia's Federation.

Moving forward, the contemporary challenge of addressing the endemic of mental illness in Australian society presents policy and administrative problems that do not respect formal jurisdictional boundaries. Whether providing continuity of care to chronic mentally ill sufferers, tackling suicide prevention, or addressing alarming rates of depression and anxiety, Commonwealth and state/territory jurisdictions must confront their interdependencies not only financially, but also across policy silos and jurisdictional spheres. While in the past the informal institutions that supported policy coordination and development in the Federation were largely invisible, in the present their nurturing is necessary for bridging formal sovereign spheres. It is crucial in order to be able to respond to cross-jurisdictional interdependency. Indeed,

1 See Milton J Lewis, *Managing Madness: Psychiatry and Society in Australia 1978–1980* (Doctoral Dissertation, Australian Institute of Health, Canberra, 1988). For more recent observations see Amanda Smullen, 'Not Centralisation but Decentralised Integration through Australia's National Mental Health Policy' (2016) 75(3) *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 280.

2 Previously the Australasian Association of Psychiatrists (created in 1946) and member of the British Medical Association from 1954.

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