

## CASE STUDY

### Research on gender sensitivity and safety in adult acute mental health inpatient units

A Department of Human Services Mental Health Branch project Gender Sensitivity and Safety in Adult Acute Mental Health Inpatient Units acknowledges that the experience of safety is multidimensional, encompassing physical, environmental and psychological determinants. It was based on the premise that appropriate treatment should be delivered within environments that are experienced as safe by consumers, their families, carers and staff.

The project consists of a literature and policy review and interviews with key stakeholders. Inpatient services were visited and a written report with recommendations is being prepared for the consideration of the Director Mental Health.

In adult acute inpatient services, men and women share limited space when very unwell. How inpatient units chose to use a one-off environmental grant to improve women's sense of security and safety in these wards is also being included in the project findings.

Professor Fiona Judd (Royal Women's Hospital Centre for Women's Mental Health) undertook the International literature review as part of the project. Professor Judd identified the following key issues that also have some relevance in Australia:

- the lack of alternatives to psychiatric hospital admission when problems became overwhelming for women with dependant children
- the risk of sexual harassment for hospitalised women from other patients and staff
- abuse, trauma and violence experienced by many women both in their life experiences and within mental health services
- creating an environment of safety and respect that will minimise the possibility of retraumatising and disempowering women
- the lack of research regarding the frequency and perceptions of sexual assault and harassment of women on psychiatric wards. Studies conducted suggest it is not uncommon.