Mental health is one of Australia’s national health priority areas. The mental health NGO sector provides an essential contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of Australians. The sector is broad, with mental health NGOs supported by other generalist NGOs and working in partnership arrangements that complement the work of public and private mental health service providers, drug and alcohol services, and other health and community sectors including general practitioners, housing, disability and employment services.

The continuum of mental health care
Australia has been moving away from medical and illness-oriented models of care towards more recovery-focused and community-based care. Australia’s mental health services are provided in a variety of ways: from hospitalisation and other residential care, hospital-based outpatient services and community mental health care services, through to consultations with both specialists and general practitioners (GPs).

The continuum of care includes the range of mental health service providers in Australia; ranging from community programs with a social model of care approach to existing state based initiatives.

No single service setting can meet all the population’s mental health needs, and NGOs play a vital role in support and collaboration with other levels on the continuum of care. Figure 1 shows the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) proposed model for the optimal mix of mental health services.

The model promotes the involvement of consumers in their own recovery and self-care continues at all levels, which in turn promotes and encourages recovery and better mental health.

Who is the mental health NGO sector?
There is a wide range of NGO services. Community managed mental health organisations provide valuable community based support options that are flexible, cost effective and essential to prevention and recovery.

Mental health NGOs may promote self-help and provide support and advocacy services for people who have a mental health problem or a mental illness, and carers or families. Psychosocial rehabilitation and support services provided by non-government community agencies include housing support, individual support, day programs, prevocational training, residential services, outreach and respite care.
The mental health NGO sector assists consumers and carers to maximise recovery, independent or supported living, and active participation in the community, leading to the delivery of recovery-focused mental health care.

**Key findings from the survey:**

- The mental health NGO sector is well-established, with 42% of survey respondent organisations reporting that they have been in operation for more than 20 years.
- 84% of organisations operated in only one state, 9% operated in all states and territories, 30% operated only in capital cities, 19% of organisations operated in very remote areas, either exclusively, or in addition to other geographic areas.
- A large percentage of organisations (31%) reported that they directly supported between 100 and 500 consumers annually, with 7% supporting over 5,000 consumers annually.

### Landscape Survey

The Landscape Survey asked organisations about their characteristics and the services they offer and was conducted between 16 December 2009 and 7 May 2010. The focus of the project was the testing of a methodology for future workforce studies of the sector, however a range of data on the sector’s size, services and workforce was gathered in the process. This was a targeted and voluntary survey, and most likely not all mental health service providers or NGOs providing some level of support to mental health consumers and carers were captured through this sample. This, combined with challenges in defining mental health NGOs and their services, means that the results are not necessarily definitive, but provide some indicative information which will be of benefit to the sector and help develop future data collection. 268 valid responses were received and survey coverage was estimated at 34% of the sector.

### Table 1. Mental Health Non-Government Organisation size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Percentage of respondent organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (0 – 10 paid staff)</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (11 – 50 paid staff)</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (greater than 50 paid staff)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 1. WHO Service Organisation Pyramid for an Optimal Mix of Services for Mental Health

This series of fact sheets summarises some of the findings from the Mental Health Non-Government Organisation Workforce Report. All results are indicative and cannot be generalised beyond the scope of this study. For a copy of the full report and other fact sheets go to www.ahwo.gov.au/publications.asp or www.hwa.gov.au.

**Other fact sheets in this series:**

- Non-Government Organisation Mental Health Service Provision
- Funding the Mental Health Non-Government Organisation Sector
- Mental Health Non-Government Organisation Workforce Characteristics