



**Mental Health
Carers NSW**



The Hon. Yasmin Catley, MP

Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism

GPO Box 5341

SYDNEY NSW 2001

CC: The Hon. Rose Jackson, MLC

Minister for Mental Health

31 July 2025

Re: Public apology needed following ongoing violent NSW Police treatment of people with mental health challenges

Dear Minister Catley

Mental Health Carers NSW and BEING – Mental Health Consumers are the NSW peak bodies representing mental health consumers and their families and carers. The NSW Police plays a vital role in protecting the citizens of NSW. However, the inability of the police to safely discharge this role with people experiencing mental health crises has severely eroded trust in NSW Police responding to people with mental health challenges.

Recent examples of unacceptable NSW Police treatment

- **The death of Collin Burling, July 2025:** Collin Burling, 45, went into cardiac arrest after being subjected to police physical restraint during a welfare check. Footage filmed by his partner showed police on top of him as he told them, "I've done nothing wrong. I can't breathe. I am dying. Help."
- **The death of Clare Nowland, May 2023:** A 95-year-old great-grandmother suffering dementia who died in her nursing home after being tasered by NSW Police while using her walking frame.
- **The death of Jesse Deacon, July 2023:** a 43-year-old man shot dead his home in Sydney by police responding to a neighbour's concern that he was self-harming.

Mental Health Carers NSW Inc. (MHCN)

Funded by the NSW Ministry of Health

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- **The death of Krista Kach, July 2023:** A 47-year-old woman, fatally shot with a taser and bean-bag rounds after and barricading herself in her apartment. Family members had called in a welfare check when Krista's mental health deteriorated following the receipt of an eviction notice.

These are just some of the 52 people experiencing a mental health crisis killed by police in the 5 years to July 2025, the vast majority of the approximately 60 people killed by police in this period. Following decades of disproportionate and excessive police force used against people in mental health crises, it is vital that people with mental health challenges, their carers, and their loved ones regain trust in NSW Police.

While the burden on NSW police is large, it is inexcusable that recurring patterns of excessive force and violence pervade the police force. Driving these reoccurring patterns are negative, stigmatising and dangerous attitudes towards mental health consumers. How police interact with mental health consumers reflects unacceptable societal attitudes about people with mental health challenges.

These attitudes are pervasive, and contribute to the marginalisation, criminalisation, incarceration, and the untimely death of mental health consumers. All too often mental health consumers are treated like offenders rather than as people needing and deserving of care, resulting in the systemic discrimination against mental health consumers.

Successive NSW governments have inadequately supported people with mental health challenges, which is a big part of why offending behaviour sometimes occurs. But they have also failed to adequately educate and train the NSW Police in methods built around safety, empathy, and de-escalation rather than brute force, and violence, driven by ignorance and stigmatising attitudes.

These deaths were entirely preventable. We call for a **public apology** to victims and loved ones. While an apology will not bring back Collin, Clare, Jesse, Krista and countless others, an apology is vital to regaining our trust. Alongside a public apology, we also call for:

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1. **A truth-telling roundtable:** As a first step toward healing, the NSW Government must recognise the hurt and anguish they have caused, especially for those who have had loved ones killed by the NSW Police. We call on the NSW Government to host a roundtable to hear directly from the community, to demonstrate their commitment to change.
2. **Engage in community consultation:** BEING and Mental Health Carers NSW have repeatedly called for trauma-informed and health-first approaches to mental health crises with the health and wellbeing of consumers at the centre. The NSW Police are not the right agency to lead responses, but health-led responses require consultation and collaboration. We urge the NSW Government to fast-track consultation on alternatives to police responding to mental health crises, and peak bodies such as BEING and Mental Health Carers NSW must work alongside the Government to ensure public accountability and trust.
3. **Annual public reporting of those killed:** The NSW Police must publicly report on how many people experiencing mental health crises were shot or otherwise injured by them each year. This report must be tabled in the NSW Parliament, as publicly available data will be a key measure of the effectiveness of any countermeasures implemented to address this deadly issue.
4. **Mandate proper police training:** Even with health-led responses in place, the NSW Police need to significantly improve how the police force interacts with people experiencing mental health challenges. Original NSW Police Mental Health Intervention Team training was an in-depth, four-day training package for officers to identify behaviours in the field and has subsequently been watered down.
5. **Provide clear information about the NSW Police Mental Health Division:** The NSW Police has a dedicated Mental Health Division. We request more information about how the division will ensure the mental health of the police workforce, and what role this division will play in regaining public trust.

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Experiencing mental health challenges should not be a death sentence. Systemic discrimination by the NSW Police against mental health consumers must stop. The lives of mental health consumers depend on it.

We would welcome a meeting with you to discuss this issue.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Harms

Giancarlo de Vera

Chief Executive Officer
Mental Health Carers NSW

Chief Executive Officer
BEING – Mental Health Consumers

This letter is endorsed by the following organisations:

- Blue Knot Foundation
- Health Consumers NSW
- Justice and Equity Centre
- Mental Health Coordinating Council
- National Justice Project
- Older Women's Network NSW
- People with Disability Australia
- Wayahead – Mental Health Association NSW

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