Vision
Optimum personal recovery and wellbeing.

Our Purpose
To provide opportunity for people living with mental illness and/or complex needs to enjoy a meaningful life by strengthening self-identity, personal responsibility and hope.

Our Guiding Principles
Recovery-orientated practice is a partnership where the person with the lived experience is the expert in their recovery and our staff bring their understanding and expertise to support this journey.

- Person centred
- Respect and dignity
- Acceptance of diversity
- Reflective practice
- Strengths based approach
- Flexibility and innovation
- Collaborative partnerships
- Community connection and participation
- Skilled, supported and informed workforce
- Evaluation, planning and continuous improvement
Mentis Assist was privileged to receive the support of our community in influencing the lives of all those associated with our agency - even in the face of an uncertain economic environment, our partners remained steadfast with their generosity.

Their commitment to Mentis provides immediate and significant impact and enables our consumers to continue to benefit from our programs. Together—because of your generosity and support — we can continue to assist people living with, or affected by mental ill-health to enjoy a full and independent life.

Mentis Assist recognises and thanks:

- Board of Governance of Mentis Assist
- Department of Health & Human Services
- Department of Social Services
- FMP Aboriginal Action Group
- FMP Primary Care Partnership (FMPPCP)
- Frankston City Council
- Headspace
- Housing Choices
- Manyung Gallery Group
- Members of Mentis Assist
- Monash Health
- Mornington Peninsula Shire
- Peninsula Carer Council
- Peninsula Health
- Peninsula Model Alliances
- Peninsula Youth & Family Service
- South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (SEMPHN)
- Southern Peninsula Community Care Centre
- Southern Peninsula Community Support & Information Centre (Rosebud & Mornington)
- VICSERV
- Volunteers of Mentis Assist
- WAYSS

Change is always challenging.

The mental health system is currently undergoing great change as we look to a future that incorporates the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and a greater emphasis within the sector on more integrated services that focus on individual needs.

In November 2015, we welcomed the federal government’s response to the National Mental Health Commission’s Review of Mental Health Programs and Services. We saw as positive a promise to overhaul Australia’s fragmented mental health system, but also recognise the demanding road ahead and work needed to see such changes come to fruition.

We understand the challenges before us and the need to embrace a more responsive and streamlined mental health system that is easy to access and navigate and ensures the best possible outcomes for clients, their families and support people.

NDIS

The NDIS heralds a new era for the mental health sector. As providers, like Mentis Assist, work to understand what the scheme will mean for those it supports and its workforce, we welcome its basic premise of giving people with a disability relating to mental illness greater choice and control over the ways in which they access services that will enable them to achieve their life goals.

As mental health services begin to transition to the NDIS, the challenge for providers has been to assess what the scheme will mean for clients and staff, and work on ways to successfully manage the change.

“The Mentis Board and management has been diligently working on strategies that will enhance the organisation by exploring more cost effective ways in which to provide supports and products to clients, ensuring each receives maximum benefit for the dollars they spend.”

We welcome the opportunities the NDIS will bring and are confident we can embrace the scheme and changes necessary to enhance the services and support we provide.

We also see the NDIS as an opportunity to broaden and diversify our services and reach, targeting new markets previously not available to us.

To further prepare for the NDIS, in September 2015 we transferred the organisation from an incorporation under the Victorian Associations Incorporations Act 2012, to a company limited by guarantee under the Commonwealth Corporation Act 2001. This change provides Mentis Assist with the opportunity to broaden its geographical reach in the future.
Recommissioning moves

Preparing to transition to the NDIS is just one of the many challenges faced by Mentis over the past few years.

The announcement by the Victorian Department of Health that it would be recommissioning mental health Non-Government Organisations, saw Mentis Assist undergo significant organisational change. However despite an uncertain time for clients, staff, volunteers and Board Directors, we successfully and professionally continued to provide services. It was inspiring to see how well the changes were managed and certainly provided confidence that we will be well-placed to ensure smooth implementation of the NDIS.

Achieving budget

We are pleased to report that financially, we have again achieved budget. A healthy operating surplus, while exceeding service targets, will provide us with financial opportunity to invest money back into the organisation. This improved financial performance will also enable the Board to operationalise client services, enabling us to upgrade staff information technology tools.

Recognition

Mentis Assist is fortunate to have dedicated Board of Governance Directors, who give freely of their time and who are committed to the continued success of our organisation, in seeing clients receive best practice services and our staff work within a supported and enjoyable environment.

Our Board members come from diverse backgrounds, including health, finance, management and marketing. We welcome requests from community members wishing to join our Board and willingly embrace the opportunity to be represented by a broad range of skills and knowledge.

The strength of Mentis Assist lies in its management team, capably led by CEO, Terry Palioportas, our dedicated and competent staff and volunteers and particularly, by our clients, who participate in our programs and always provide valuable feedback about the support they receive.

Dawn Fisher
Chair, Board of Governance

Terry Palioportas
Chief Executive officer

New era, new name

Mentis Assist is proud of the positive footprint it has left across the Mornington Peninsula over the past 28 years. From humble beginnings, which saw the organisation start with just three employees, we today employ more than 50 staff, supported by a number of volunteers.

Over the years, we have offered a comprehensive range of groups and programs, all of which were implemented based on client requirement and requests, and funding guidelines.

As the mental health sector readies to embrace a new NDIS environment, we thought it timely to re-brand with a new name and look.

Following extensive consultation with clients, staff, volunteers and Board, in August 2015 we launched our new name, Mentis Assist. Thanks to careful planning, we enjoyed a smooth transition from our previous name, Peninsula Support Services (PSS), and since launching, the new name has been well-received throughout the local community and is becoming increasingly well-known.

With almost 30 years’ working within the Peninsula region, we enjoy a solid reputation and are respected throughout the community, by governments and other regional agencies. We have no doubt this hard-earned respect will hold us in good stead when the NDIS is introduced to the area in 2019.
Dawn Fisher
Chairperson
Dawn Fisher has many years’ experience in nursing in the UK. Since migrating to Australia in 1982 she has worked in the field of psychiatry, with a focus on working with the elderly who have psychiatric problems. Dawn was involved in the initial establishment of Mentis Assist, and served on the Board in those early years. Dawn is a qualified General and Psychiatric nurse, and has a Graduate Diploma of Gerontology, and a Diploma of Advanced Business.

Kevin Clarke
Treasurer
Kevin has extensive experience in corporate governance and a strong knowledge of the local catchment. Previous roles include Director Corporate Services with Frankston Mornington Peninsula Medicare Local and a number of Director Corporate Services roles in government both locally and interstate. He is passionate about corporate governance, finance and risk management. Kevin is a Certified Practicing Accountant and also holds a Bachelor of Business (Local Government). Kevin has been a resident on the Peninsula for over 25 years.

Ila Howard
Deputy Chairperson
Ila Howard has tertiary qualifications in welfare and business management and has a history of working in the local community with families and carers, specialising in dementia, aged care, mental health and intellectual disabilities. She has been a resident on the Peninsula for over 20 years.

Sue Kavanagh
Secretary
Sue has returned to reside on the Peninsula after almost 20 years working interstate and has been a Mentis Assist Board member since 2013. She possesses extensive experience working in management positions in the areas of aged care, disability, mental health and homelessness. Having worked in both the government and not for profit sectors, she has a thorough understanding of the demands and accountabilities of NGOs including the diverse funding arrangements. She also has extensive experience in community development, facilitating new community based support services in towns across the Pilbara in WA as well as in QLD. Her latest role was CEO of community based organisation Footprints in Brisbane Inc.

Elain Bakker
Elain Bakker has a long involvement in community organisations, community houses, community theatre and local development associations, and has been a member of various state level organisations, the Australian Education Union, Teachers Registration Board and Institute of Teaching. She is currently Secretary of Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association, and a Board member of the Community House Network, Southern Region and President of Mornington Community Contact Board.

Tracey May
Tracey May has extensive experience gained in several senior HR management positions within both the corporate, professional services, not for profit and more recently health sector. Her experience spans areas such as organisational / cultural change, executive coaching, recruitment, learning and development, strategic planning, employee relations and generalist HR consulting. Tracey is a chartered member of the Australian Institute of Human Resources (AHRI) and a member of the Monash University Alumni MBA student mentoring program. Tracey is currently Head of Human Resources, Hospira. Previous roles have included EGM People and Culture, Victoria Racing Club and Head of People, KPMG.

Warren Cecil
Warren Cecil has a widespread background in business to business sales and marketing within the events, hospitality and automotive industries. He has an in-depth understanding of the Australian funding landscape with extensive exposure within the corporate, not-for-profit and public sectors and a keen passion to assist the community through government, philanthropic and corporate partnership opportunities.
The Mentis Assist Mental Health Community Support Services (MHCSS) Adult Team works with some of the Mornington Peninsula’s most disadvantaged people. They understand how important it is to provide a holistic approach to assistance as it works with clients to help them navigate a myriad of services to support their mental health, addiction, legal, housing and psychosocial needs.

Since the introduction of a Centralised Intake for the MHCSS program, we have noted a significant shift in the types of people presenting: where once the profile of those in need of help included a mix of people with mild, medium or moderate mental health issues, a triage system that prioritises based on urgency for outreach services, means that today’s clients are likely to have persistent mental health conditions with multiple and complex needs.

The MHCSS program supports clients to gain or clarify their diagnosis and/or review their medications. We are thankful for the collaborative support we receive from:

• Peninsula Health, Southern Dual Diagnosis Service and numerous private psychiatrists

• The Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Drug and Alcohol Service, in conjunction with TaskForce’s Stepping Up program, in providing addiction assessments, counseling support and appropriate pathways to recovery through detox and rehabilitation services

• SalvoCare who assists with temporary housing for vulnerable clients in times of crisis and works with us to prevent homelessness.

Planning ahead

The strength of the MHCSS Adult Team lies within its dedicated and committed staff who work hard to provide the highest standards of service. We operate within a demanding and complex environment and are proud of the way in which our teams doggedly champion for client rights.

Following completion of employee development plans in early 2016, we provided individual and team-based training to ensure staff stay up-to-date with new and emerging research in the fields of mental health, drug and alcohol, and other related specialty areas.

With the Bayside Peninsula roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) expected to begin in 2019, we have begun discussion around how this will affect clients and the way in which we provide services. Further NDIS education will be carried out in the year ahead.

Mindful learning

To give clients access to a more natural way of improving mental and physical wellbeing, MHCSS’ Ecotherapy group provides opportunities to be nourished by activities like meditation and mindfulness, gardening, African drumming, journal writing and art in nature.

Ecotherapy uses a range of treatment programs, usually done outdoors in nature, to help manage existing mental health programs, or to prevent future episodes of ill health. By learning to care for the natural environment, the group also learns to connect to their inner self and gain greater insight into self-care.

As one client involved with the Ecotherapy group noted:

“Helping to plant and care for seedlings and watch them grow and produce gave me a sense of accomplishment and motivated me to start a vegetable garden at home. The group has given me a sense of purpose and made me a stronger person. I now have more belief in myself and my abilities.”

To ensure the best possible outcomes for Sam, a care team was developed, made up of professionals, family members and friends.

A team approach

‘Sam’ began using drugs at just 16.

In the years that followed, Sam’s life slowly spiralled out of control and by his mid-30s was injecting methamphetamine on a daily basis.

In February 2014, not long after being released from prison on a Community Corrections Order that was conditional on him seeking help, he became a client of Mentis Assist.

Clinically diagnosed with mental health issues and Bipolar Type 2, Sam was living in a transitional property. However, his daily drug use was causing significant problems with his landlord and neighbours.

A worker from the Mentis Assist’s Mental Health Program (MHP) met with Sam and gradually developed a therapeutic relationship. Sam was supported to connect with relevant services to assist his health issues and to avoid returning to prison. Mentis even worked closely with Sam’s landlord to maintain his tenancy.

To ensure the best possible outcomes for Sam, a care team was developed, made up of professionals, family members and friends. Sam was encouraged to seek out activities that would steer him away from potentially harmful situations: he took up paddle boarding and other exercises beneficial to his physical and mental health.

Slowly, Sam began to reconnect with his family and in a surprising twist, a childhood sweetheart came back into his life.

Now aged 39, Sam has been four months clean from drugs. He works part time and he and his girlfriend, who share a home on a two hectare property, are planning a future together.

*Not his real name
A brighter future

For the past five years, Kaitlyn’s life has been a rollercoaster of change and emotional turmoil. However, despite battling depression, alcoholism and an addiction to prescription drugs, she still counts herself as lucky.

“My journey has been turbulent, but it’s also been one of personal growth and achievement,” says the 25-year-old. “I have met and worked with some amazing people and without their support I wouldn’t be here today.”

Kaitlyn was just 20 when she found herself sitting in a psychologist’s room: she was depressed and her reckless behaviour was becoming increasingly out of control. Trying to cope with a difficult period in her life, she was also drinking heavily.

Within a year, she was admitted to rehabilitation for alcohol addiction. Over the next three years, she would be admitted a further three times. And alcohol wasn’t her only problem: she was abusing medications, committing self-harm and had even attempted suicide.

With seemingly no future in sight, Kaitlyn was referred to Mentis Assist. Life suddenly took a positive turn.

“My outreach worker was amazing. She worked with me on strategies to manage my anxiety and depression and find better ways to deal with life and relationships. She found me accommodation and supported me in returning to study” (Kaitlyn is completing a Diploma in counselling).

What seemed a setback six months ago, when Kaitlyn was admitted to hospital, turned out to be a blessing: she was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder and finally prescribed medication to balance her moods.

“My life has changed dramatically. I am now more present, feel happier and better able to cope. Thoughts of suicide or self-harm have gone,” she says.

Kaitlyn now sees a future for herself. “Without the support of so many I wouldn’t be here today. I am so grateful and hope to one day give back to the community by working in the mental health field.”

Mentis Assist understands the challenges associated with caring for someone with a mental or emotional illness. Through our trained mental health practitioners and peer specialists we offer short-term assistance for carers (family, friends) to support them in their role.

Like the many changes experienced within Victoria’s mental health system over the past year, including the staged roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Mentis carers’ team has needed to modify services to ensure it continues to provide the great support for which it is known.

For many clients, the changes have affected their ability to easily access services, with focus now shifting from early intervention and recovery towards prioritising clients with more complex needs. This has placed more pressure on carers to support those clients considered low priority or with less complex needs. As a result, more clients have turned to crisis/clinical mental health services, putting pressure on an already stressed system.

Taking a break

With many local families experiencing complex and difficult situations, where possible, the Mentis carers’ team aims to work one-on-one with people to ensure more individualised and personal support.

To better assist carers, we partner with groups like Carers Vic, to offer access to educational sessions and events that provide time out and opportunity to connect with other carers. In the past year, we have offered a range of exciting events, from popular Op Shop tours, line dancing and a monthly morning tea.

In April, a Port Phillip Bay cruise saw 17 carers and three Mentis staff experience a relaxing day out that included lunch, an historical tour and dolphin, seal and bird life sightings. Feedback from carers was overwhelmingly positive, with each thankful for this rare opportunity.

We provide time out and opportunity to connect with other carers

Youth team

The Mentis Youth team assists many young clients with one-on-one and group support. The team works across a range of different settings including Headspace Frankston, the Mornington Peninsula Youth Services (MPYS) Centre in Mornington (‘The Corner’) and the Frankston Y-PARC, a short-term residential facility for young people aged 16 to 25 with serious mental health issues.

Mentis has been offering group activities at Y-PARC for five years.

While most find individual support beneficial, many young people also enjoy group sessions, including the group we run at Headspace Frankston, the ‘Future Women’ program we offer in partnership with MPYS and the fishing group, which attracts a large number of young (and not so young) clients. Our team also works out of Y-PARC each week, providing group activities for those staying at the facility.

Thanks to all who have contributed to our program, practitioners, carers and young people and partners. We look forward to continuing to develop our Carer and Youth programs in the coming year.
MENTAL HEALTH AND HOMELESSNESS PROGRAM (MHHP)

The Mentis Assist Mental Health and Homelessness Program (MHHP) recognises the complex challenges and needs experienced by the long-term homeless and the barriers they face in accessing the services they require.

Working towards a common goal

MHHP targets such people, particularly those with a severe and enduring mental illness, along with high and complex support needs, including substance abuse. Due to their vulnerability, this group are acute users of hospital emergency departments and crisis centres.

While Mentis Assist acknowledges there is no set pattern or pathway into or out of homelessness, we do know that this population faces significant blocks to accessing treatment and support, particularly when support comes from service providers working independently and collaboration is limited to referral between each service.

We are committed to assisting this group and aim to reduce the many costs associated with ongoing homelessness, including:

- Repeated hospitalisation
- Preventable psychiatric emergencies requiring police, ambulance and/or mental health assistance
- Emergency department presentations
- Involvement with the criminal justice system
- Chronic, unaddressed health issues

Increasing demand

The past year has been one of growth for the MHHP program. Of the more than 175 referrals received, 74 people were assisted, while the remaining 101 were referred to more appropriate services. We have been heartened by the number of good news stories emanating from the program, with staff assisting clients to access a range of much-needed services, including:

- Housing
- Health and allied health
- Psychiatry
- Support groups
- Forensic (for people with mental health problems who have been arrested, are on remand or who have been to court and found guilty of a crime)
- Disability
- Employment
- Dental

Seeking solutions

To better support the long-term homeless and/or those with mental health problems, we offer a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary program, which is staffed by Mentis Assist (lead agency, providing community mental health support), Peninsula Health Mental Health (clinical mental health) and SalvoCare Eastern (housing).

Based at Peninsula Health’s Mental Health Clinic in Frankston, the program uses an Assertive Community Outreach model with services progressively introduced to meet the client group’s ever-changing needs. This flexible approach can also be tailored to match individual needs.

The approach has been extremely successful, with agencies working and advocating together within one program to minimise the difficulties faced by clients trying to access multiple services.

Program staff comprise a manager, senior psychiatric clinician, case managers, housing officer and administration assistance. Staff roles vary and can include assertive outreach, street and drop in centre visits, case management, community education and development activities, clinical assessment and housing.

The program plans to strengthen its service with the appointment of an AOD clinician. The clinician role, expected to be announced at the start of July 2016, will provide primary and secondary consultation, assessment and treatment, enhance team learning and will be pivotal in providing clients with much-needed access to drug treatment.

A team approach

Born into a family that had seen generations of trauma and conflict, Paul’s life journey was never going to be easy. Adding to his difficult family life, Paul was also born with significant health issues, which affected his hearing, speech and learning.

As he grew, so too did Paul’s sense of not belonging; of struggling to find his place in the world. In time, Paul became homeless, which was compounded by mental health and substance use issues.

To survive, he did what he needed to do, often to the detriment of his mental, social, spiritual and physical health. He found it difficult to keep a job. His health issues brought stigmatisation and rejection.

At age 39, Paul had been homeless since he was 16. It was at a boarding house that he first encountered Mentis Assist, which began working with him, in partnership with other service providers. From there, Paul began his journey towards recovering from more than 20 years of polysubstance abuse and addiction to ICE.

With multiple and complex care needs, Paul was also linked with Mentis’ Partners in Recovery Program, who referred him to the organisation’s Mental Health and Homelessness Program. Through MHHP’s partnership with Peninsula Health, Paul had access to a psychiatrist, who clinically diagnosed his mental health issues.

With a strong support team behind him, Paul found a transitional house. He received hearing aids for the first time in his life, allowing him to participate more in his care and to advocate for himself. His confidence grew and he independently joined several community support groups, including Narcotics Anonymous and his local church. Along with a part-time job, Paul also began to volunteer. Importantly, he stopped using ICE.

Paul’s road to recovery is due in part to the amazing collaborative efforts of so many. But most of all, it is thanks to the commitment and understanding of a care team that worked closely with him, who understood his needs and gave him the therapeutic space essential to initiate his own healing process and create his own life changes.

*Not his real name.
The Mentis Assist Partners in Recovery (PIR) program focuses strongly on working with clients with persistent mental illness and complex support needs, particularly those who require assistance from a range of agencies across different sectors.

Since it was established in 2013 the PIR program has successfully supported 173 clients and currently assists 45 active clients.

These individuals have persistent symptoms, including significant functional impairment and psychosocial difficulties. Because of this, they can become disconnected from social, family and clinical networks and community supports. Many suffer multiple substance use and/or physical health issues and often find it difficult to maintain stable accommodation and complete basic daily living activities.

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Year in review

The past year has been incredibly gratifying for PIR as we continue to work in an integrative and collaborative way with services and supports across multiple sectors to ensure our clients’ voices are heard and their needs met.

We are committed to system reform and have been instrumental in identifying gaps and working to strengthen and develop the resources needed not only for clients on their recovery journey, but for the services they use.

Over the past year, key PIR System Reform activities include:

- A Private Rental Brokerage Program, which successfully placed 16 clients into private rental accommodation. Each client continues to live within and sustain their own home.
- A new Outreach Support role developed between our Mornington Peninsula and Frankston PIR teams. The role was created after we identified a significant gap due to extensive and lengthy wait lists at Central Intake. The PIR Outreach worker will focus on short-term support while clients remain on the wait list.

As a result of these initiatives, and the hard work of staff, other key 2015-2016 highlights include:

- Clients better supported to navigate services across different sectors
- Clients regularly achieving identified recovery goals
- Family and carers more empowered and better supported
- Greater integrated and coordinated services to ensure clients’ range of needs are met
- More collaboration, greater communication and shared responsibility between services and providers to ensure PIR client needs are met.

We are committed to system reform and have been instrumental in identifying gaps and working to strengthen and develop the resources needed not only for clients on their recovery journey, but for the services they use.

A journey to recovery

At 26, *Heather* knows all too well the turbulent fallout from a childhood of sexual abuse: Bipolar Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, depression and anxiety. She also has an extended history of illegal drug use, including ICE and cannabis.

Abused by her father from the age of five, and subsequent partners since, in September last year, Heather had had enough. She wanted to rebuild her life, to reengage in education and continue her psychology studies at university. But she didn’t know where to turn or who to ask for help.

It was then that Heather was introduced to the Mentis Assist PIR program.

As Heather began her slow journey towards recovery, she did so with a supportive arm around her. Working in partnership with other service providers, PIR secured Heather a place in drug rehabilitation, also organising for her Department of Housing rent to be suspended while she completed the program.

To break away from an abusive relationship, PIR worked with police and the Department of Health and Human Services to secure her home and living arrangements. Through PIR’s Support Facilitator and Outreach team, Heather even managed to make contact with her family.

With many challenges still to face, Heather is hopeful that with the right help, she will be strong enough to fight these and looks forward to living life free from abuse and addiction.

*Not her real name*
HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM

The past year has been one of growth for the HACC Program across all areas. This is particularly pleasing as we had been through a period where lack of participants in some areas may have led to group closure. We have now reached capacity with our Planned Activity and Supported Residential Services groups, due largely to positive promotion by support facilitators and participants.

Changing client profile

Our participants are now presenting with more complex needs than previously experienced by the program. The Mentis HACC program no longer focuses exclusively on those with diagnosed mental health issues, but is now available to all HACC eligible community members.

Attendance at our Supported Residential Services group has also increased, as this marginalised group is often limited in finding community engagement opportunities due to complex personal issues and/or lack of personal funds. Where possible, our team aims to provide one-on-one support to existing clients, assisting with ways in which to source financial help, links to appropriate clinical supports, finding alternate accommodation and connecting to culturally appropriate community groups.

Our HACC Access and Support worker has worked tirelessly to establish her role within the catchment area, particularly in collaborating with other access and support workers. This has enabled the team to provided specialist mental health support and information and service referral for clients facing diversity barriers. These groups included Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-gender, Intersex (LGBTI), those under financial distress and people living with dementia.

Targeting diversity

We continue to reference the Southern Metropolitan Region HACC Diversity Plan and Active Service Model (ASM) to lead service delivery. As part of our annual review, we completed a population plan to assist in better identifying our target groups. As a result, the decision was made to focus on the LGBTI community and to ensure we provide a sensitive and accessible service.

1 in 10 of our target identify as LGBTI

Statistics show 10 per cent of our target population identify with LGBTI and recent research indicates that mental health issues, self-harm and suicide attempt rates are disproportionately high in this community. In October, our program coordinator attended the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Conference in Melbourne, while LGBTI sensitive training was provided to our HACC team through the HACC training program.

Thanks to all who have contributed to our program, practitioners and participants, and we look forward to continuing to develop our HACC program in the coming year.
Established in 2009, the Participants Advisory Group (PAG) provides a valuable voice for clients and carers associated with Mentis Assist. With its membership made up of those who have gone through Mentis recovery programs, PAG meets regularly to discuss issues associated with mental health and ways in which it believes the organisation can change or improve services. The group also makes recommendations to the Board and staff on mental health policies and programs, particularly those it believes are in the best interests of clients and carers.

Feedback and review
Over the past year, PAG has actively worked on reviewing a number of policies and procedures to ensure client and carer needs and expectations are at the forefront of any documentation changes. Among those policies reviewed were the Rights and Responsibilities, Working with Carers and Grievance Procedures.

In August, PAG conducted a clients and carers telephone survey to ascertain what clients thought of the service they were receiving. Feedback was sought on what programs clients had been involved in, how these helped and suggestions on ways in which to improve services.

We thank and acknowledge the PAG members who assisted with conducting the survey, the results of which were collated and forwarded to management. Feedback showed that while clients acknowledged the benefit of individually seeing workers, they were keen to have group sessions reintroduced. Overall, clients rated their satisfaction with the organisation as high.

PAG also surveyed Mentis staff to gauge if they clearly understood the group’s role and what it did, and to gain feedback on ways in which it could better assist the organisation in its work and interaction with clients and carers. While most were aware of PAG, there was some confusion about its role, an issue we plan to review in the coming year. Staff also provided valuable feedback about ways in which PAG could benefit them and their clients, including more client forums and input from PAG.

The group continues to build on strengthening its relationship with Mentis and over the past year participated in a number of audits, held as part of an organisational review, whilst we also updated our information brochure to ensure it provides relevant and educational material.

PAG could not exist without the dedication and commitment of its volunteer members who give generously of their time to support the group and provide insight into their journey as a means of assisting others along their path to recovery.

We welcomed two new members – Kate Thorpe and Murray Jackson, and said goodbye to Adrian Coombs and Avril Benjamin.

The financial statements for Mentis Assist Ltd for the year ended 30 June 2016 have been audited by Shepard Webster and O’Neill Pty Ltd and found to be true and fair and in accordance with the relevant laws and accounting standards.

As a publicly funded not-for-profit organisation, it is imperative that our finances are well managed, with an emphasis on ensuring we achieve best value for money in delivering high quality services. This is achieved through the establishment of a strong financial reporting and governance framework and effective finance and administration policies and procedures.

Our results for 2015-16 show a healthy surplus of $474,105, allowing us the capacity to further develop our programs and supporting infrastructure to take advantage of opportunities as we move towards the introduction of the NDIS. In 2015-16 we embarked on major upgrades to our internal phone system and implemented a major rebranding and marketing campaign, both focused on future NDIS need.

Our balance sheet is also strong. The accumulated surplus is $1,685,382, which again is an important consideration for NDIS as it allows us to implement a range of new projects for 2016/17, including ongoing marketing and business development, implementation of new finance and payroll systems (with integration to the client management system), and further development of mobile IT solutions for our outreach staff.

Financial performance

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