



# **Communities in Control Official Opening**

Address to the Communities in Control Conference  
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**2007 Communities in Control Conference  
Convened by  
Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services**

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Thank you Rhonda for your introduction, your warm and kind words and for our dear friendship. It all means a great deal to me, as does your invitation to speak at the opening of this very special conference.

The Pratt Foundation's mission statement is to enrich the lives of our communities. We chose those words carefully. In fact, we hope that our giving does enrich communities and that it adds value.

We also chose the words *lives* and *communities* because we care about a wide variety of community causes in our society. Over recent years I've added a line to our mission statement: *to provide real help for real people with real needs.*

Whether we're grantmakers or grant receivers, we forget sometimes that community is synonymous with real people, with real names and with real needs. So I was very pleased to read some of the real stories in the background notes of this conference on, and I quote, "How community advocacy has changed lives and changed Australia".

The report goes on to nominate 10 examples of those real stories and each example begins with, "Imagine if ...". Imagine if women had no right to equal pay for equal work of equal value. Imagine if people with disabilities still lived behind the walls of institutions. Imagine if Aboriginal Australians had no land rights at all. Each of these examples reminds us of the very real stories which have changed Australia for the better.

But what if communities had not worked together to enrich our lives in these all important areas?

So this morning, as well as learning from the past, I'd like to look ahead and ask you to "Imagine if ..." about the future.

Now I'm sure there are many things about Australian life which each of you would nominate as your number one priority. But for me and for the Pratt Foundation our number one priority is mental health. Why? First and foremost mental health is the basis for a healthy society

where people matter, families matter and communities flourish. Well that's the positive reason.

But then there's a negative, an all too realistic reason. Serious mental illness – schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and clinical depression – is now amongst the top five health disabilities in Australia and the developed world, and is a growing and increasingly costly disability. Moreover, mental health and physical health are two sides of the same coin. As all the evidence and research tells us there is a direct interaction between mental breakdown and physical illness and between physical health and mental wellness.

Yet despite the pain and suffering, not to mention the cost to our economy, we have been slow as a society and as communities to respond, which means that our governments of all persuasions have also been slow.

Until recently I believe the lack of significant investment in our mental health services was scandalous. But let's remember it was also our scandal, not just the government's. After all, the whole point of this conference is that communities are in control and that therefore communities can change lives and change Australia.

So when it comes to mental health, I'd like to look ahead and "Imagine if ...". Imagine if we could intervene more successfully in early childhood and prevent just an additional 10% of our young people from going on to substance abuse, poor school performance, low self-esteem, depression and suicide.

Imagine if we could make sure that an additional 10% of Aboriginal children could have accelerated learning programs, stay in school, take pride in their culture and yet have a genuine chance to participate in the wider society as mainstream Australians.

Imagine if we could help just an additional 10% of the single mothers in our rural communities who suffer from mental illness, to break the vicious circle of welfare, poverty and breakdown.

Imagine if we could help just an additional 10% of teenagers who suffer from psychotic illness to recover and so return to studies and work.

And imagine if we could provide psychological support for an additional 10% of families whose members, young or old, suffer from mental illness.

At The Pratt Foundation we have committed more than \$10 million over the next five years in a range of partnerships with government and community agencies, large and small, like those at this conference, who share our concerns about mental health.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have no illusions about the size of the challenge that mental health presents, and we have no illusions about the difference that philanthropy can make. But imagine if. Imagine if community advocates could make just a 10% difference to the way Australia thinks about mental health. And then another 10%. It doesn't take much imagination to see how that difference would create new real stories and change the lives of real people with real needs in the real Australia.

Thank you and all the best for a great conference.

# Communities in Control 2007

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