

media release

Date 29 August 2001
For immediate release

sane

A U S T R A L I A

www.sane.org

Media watchdog on mental health issues wins national award

SANE StigmaWatch – an Internet-based watchdog to monitor the Australian media's reporting of mental health - was today named winner of the *Gold Award for the Best Mental Health Promotion Program* at The Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference

'Brainchild' of mental health charity SANE Australia, StigmaWatch monitors print and electronic media, as well as advertising, for cases of stigma. Cases of inaccurate or offensive material relating to mental illness and suicide are detailed on SANE's top-rated website and those responsible are encouraged to report more accurately in future.

The StigmaWatch program has received wide acclaim with the Federal Government recently announcing major funding to expand the program.

Receiving the award in Wellington, SANE Australia's executive director, Barbara Hocking said: 'Australians get most of their information about mental illness through the media, so it's vital that TV programs, journalists and advertisers get it right'.

'Probably the most common report to StigmaWatch is the incorrect use of the word schizophrenia to describe a split personality or split nature; inaccurately describing everything from two identities living in the same body to a fluctuating stock market to a fashion collection as schizophrenic,' says Ms Hocking.

'It's hardly surprising people still believe the mythical stereotype of schizophrenia as a split personality.

'The role of SANE StigmaWatch is to help educate those who create the media messages we see and hear every day, to improve this situation,' says Ms Hocking.

Stigma and prejudice are the number one concern of those affected, according to research conducted by SANE. Stigma is also a major factor in people not seeking help and receiving treatment when they develop a mental illness.

Recent targets of StigmaWatch include Channel Seven's *Today Tonight*; Twentieth Century Fox – who agreed to remove offensive wording from the *Me, Myself and Irene* video cover – and Samboy Chips – who dumped their 'Psycho Strength' chips after a complaint from SANE. For more details visit the StigmaWatch Log at www.sane.org

SANE Australia
a national charity
helping people affected
by mental illness

SANE media contact
Lorraine Chiroiu
03 9682 5933
0414 427 291
campaign@sane.org

– ends –