

**REVIEW OF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MENTAL HEALTH, ALCOHOL
AND OTHER DRUG SERVICES PLAN 2015-2015**



YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

APRIL 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia with a membership of over 300 youth service organisations, community organisations, academics, individuals and most importantly young people themselves. Established in 1980, YACWA has worked tirelessly for 30 years to deliver high-level representation and advocacy for the Western Australian youth sector and young people.

We work to ensure that young people and the workforce that support them are valued, informed and have opportunities to influence public policy. Our vision is to develop a Western Australian community where all young people are empowered and have their human rights maintained. A community that values young peoples knowledge and engages them in decision-making.

Our role, amongst others, is to:

- Advocate for and work in partnership with young people to empower them to be actively included in public policy decision making
- Encourage the active participation of young people in identifying and dealing with issues that are important to them
- Highlight young people's human rights and ensure breaches are addressed
- Maximise opportunities to influence public policy discussion and ensure the voice of young people and the workforce drives action,
- Actively provide member informed, evidence based responses to all levels of government.
- Promote equity, equality, access and participation for young people in Western Australia

YACWA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on this draft Plan. Mental health has been, and continues to be, a growing systemic issue for children and young people in Western Australia, significantly impacting their human rights. The cost in years lost and also on our economy is also large, and we must urgently act to avoid damaging the lives of our next generation. Whilst we are supportive of this document, we urge Government to fulfill its commitments as outlined below.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

YACWA commends the Government of Western Australia and the Mental Health Commission for the draft Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 (the 'Plan'). It is a substantial, and we congratulate all stakeholders involved in getting this Plan to where it is today.

Viewed as a whole, we are supportive of its aims, strategies and actions, particularly as children and young people have been identified as a priority focus. YACWA also strongly advocates for a mental health system that is person-centred, whole-of-sector and evidence-based.

We are particularly encouraging of the increased focus on early intervention; commitments to increase service provision and community based treatment and support; development of specialised state –wide services; creation of improved forensic services; and, the objectives outlined within system improvement supporting change.

However, concerns do exist with regards to the ensuring funding of the Plan, and the ability of rural and regional mental health services to cope with growing demand in the immediate future. Whilst we understand the need to incrementally improve our system, we do believe that in certain areas such as service provision and forensic services, more must be done now.

In our consultations, we also met with approximately 50 Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Western Australia ('MYANWA') members who provided input into eight sections of the plan, regarding the specific impact the Plan will have on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People ('CALD'). In summary, this sector believes that whilst the plan will improve some areas related to the mental health of this specific group of young people, more specific services are required.

YACWA FOCUS AREAS

PREVENTION AND PROMOTION

YACWA believes that prevention and promotion strategies are essential to improving the mental health of children and young people across Western Australia. In particular, we are supportive of the specific strategies relating to the delivery of programs; services and initiatives that are youth friendly; and, coordinated and targeted responses for high-risk groups are vital to improving current outcomes (s6.5). We also recognise the impact that alcohol and other drugs have on children and young people, similarly supporting the increased focus within this area, and the amalgamation of the Mental Health Commission with the Alcohol and Drug Office (s6.5.1).

Importantly, the Plan mentions the success of current programs being implemented by the Mental Health Commission and the Drug and Alcohol Office and NGO's. YACWA believes that programs such as Act, Belong Commit and Music Feedback are effective in changing the perception of mental health in our community, and must be further supported in any expansion of mental health programs within our State. As such, we support the increase spent on promotion within the Commission's budget (s.6.6.3, s6.6.6, s6.6.13).

In relation to suicide prevention (s.6.6.1), key outcomes such as greater public awareness; coordinated and targeted responses for high-risk groups; shared responsibility across government; private and non-government sectors to build mentally healthy workplaces and increased suicide prevention training, are welcomed by YACWA (s.6.5.2). We further commend the strategy of shared responsibility between Government and NGO's in suicide prevention.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

YACWA supports the focus on community support services within the Plan. It is vital that children and young people are able to obtain recovery focused support in an environment suited to their needs, and hospitalised treatment should only be seen as an option in exceptional cases.

The commitment to double the state provision of community support services from 440,000 hours of support to 888,000 hours of support, with a particular focus on rural and remote areas and youth by the end of 2017 (s7.6.2) is supported by YACWA.

YACWA also supports the connection that community support services play in reducing homelessness, as outlined in the Plan (s7.6.5, s7.6.7, s7.6.11). It is clear that homelessness and mental health are closely linked and often occur as a result of each other.¹ The Not-for-profit should be involved heavily in this space due to their capacity to be flexible to the needs of our community.

In previous consultations with community members, substance abuse has been identified as a growing factor contributing to an increase in ill-mental health. We welcome youth-friendly safe places for those with alcohol and other drug (including volatile substances) use issues (7.6.4).

However, we do hold concerns with regards to the timeframe of increasing these services. Given the already systemically high rates of mental ill health within our community, we recommend that these aims be brought forward to reflect the urgency of these services in our communities.

COMMUNITY TREATMENT SERVICES

YACWA supports the strategies and outcomes within the Plan regarding Community Treatment Services. There is a need to improve mainstream services whilst also addressing the specific needs of young people. The plan in general, recognises a gap in public infant, child and adolescent community treatment mental health services, which was communicated often in our consultations.

We are particularly supportive of the new age cohorts that will create four age streams (s8.5.2). YACWA has advocated for this in previous advocacy around mental health. Similarly, we support the establishment of a police co-response program (s8.5.4) that will seek to reduce community stigma surrounding mental health.

We also welcome the increase of infant, children and adolescent community treatment services by doubling the provision of community treatment hours of service across the state from 373,000 hours to 729,000 hours (s8.6.1); building on current youth services through commissioning dedicated public mental health youth services across the state for 16 to 24 year olds (s8.6.2); and, expanding the number of regional alcohol and other drug service hubs and increase the capacity to provide additional services such as outreach (8.6.11).

Similarly it is integral that we strengthen partnerships and information flow between services working within the mental health sector, and the commitment to engage with the primary care sector (8.6.14) is extremely positive with regards to enhancing screening and early intervention.

COMMUNITY BED BASED SERVICES

YACWA is supportive of the focus on community bed based services as outlined within the Plan. We welcome the focus on providing increased recovery oriented services in a residential

¹ Park, J.M., Metraux, S., Culhane, D. & Mandell, D. (2012) Homelessness and children's use of mental health services: a population-based study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, pp. 261-265

style setting and residential rehabilitation, to enable consumers to move to more independent living.

In particular, strategies aimed at expanding the number of mental health community bed based services, particularly in the regions (9.5.1); expand existing alcohol and other drug residential treatment and rehabilitation services (9.6.3); commence the development and implementation of a residential alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation service (30 beds) for Aboriginal people and their families in the Southern region of the State (9.6.4); deliver a new service specifically designed for youth alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation (with an additional 13 beds) in the metropolitan area (9.6.7).

However, we are concerned that there is no mention of youth for community bed based services in rural and remote areas. We recommend that the Plan include specialised community bed based services in rural and regional Western Australia, where young people are often placed in acute care due to a lack of appropriate residential services.

HOSPITAL BED BASED SERVICES

Hospital bed based services must be reserved for some of the most exceptional cases, and YACWA seeks to ensure that our system promotes community services where appropriate. However, it is critical to ensure that when young people who require hospital bed based services, that these services are specific and appropriate to their needs.

Whilst we acknowledge the commitment to increase beds for young people in our metropolitan area (10.6.1, 10.6.3), we have concerns that young people in rural communities will still experience inappropriate and inadequate services. We recommend that services in these areas be expanded.

SPECIALISED STATEWIDE SERVICES

YACWA is supportive of the creation and development specialised statewide services. In our consultations, children and young people have spoken of the unavailability of accessing appropriate services for mental health. This is often exacerbated for children and young people who may be particularly vulnerable to experiencing disadvantage in our community.

In particular, the doubling of hours of service will enhance mental health treatment for young people, resulting in a significant increase in high quality, effective and efficient service provision. YACWA also welcomes the opportunity to build networks and foster partnerships, as this will further grow the effectiveness of our mental health sector to respond to the unique needs of young people.

Similarly, specific strategies to expand and develop services impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health services, transcultural mental health services, children in care, homelessness, youth and adult eating disorders, sexuality, sex and gender diversity service, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, are welcomed by YACWA. Services of this nature are in urgent demand, and will assist in improving the mental health outcomes of young people.

FORENSIC SERVICES

YACWA supports the development of forensic services. Far too many young people in our justice system have mental health problems, complicating their rehabilitation if not addressed appropriately. Further, many young people with mental health issues appear in our justice system due to the unavailability of services in our community.

We support the emphasis on intervening early (12.5.1), establishing specific youth forensic services (12.5.2), ensuring access to services available to individuals in the community (12.5.3), and establishing transitioning services (s12.5.5) is extremely encouraging.

However, we are concerned that the aim to increase the number of beds will take 10 years, despite urgent needs for these now. To reduce this immediately, we recommend these aims be brought forward.

SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT AND SUPPORTING CHANGE

Western Australians are geographically and culturally diverse, presenting a unique situation when addressing mental health. We have also seen continual increases in young people's susceptibility to mental health problems, to systemic proportions, despite increased investment into research and service provision.

The aims as outlined in this section are ultimately positive. We are particularly supportive of the promotion of personal recovery (s13.3); encouraging culturally competent service development and delivery (s.13.4); developing a youth mental health stream of services (s13.5); improving integration and system navigation (13.7); and, workforce development (13.9).

A FOCUS ON MULTICULTURAL YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE WORKFORCE THAT SUPPORTS THEM

Children and young people from 'CaLD' backgrounds encounter a myriad of mental health concerns due to their complex situation, exacerbating their susceptibility to ill mental health. Feedback gained from community leaders and more importantly, young people themselves, indicates clearly that mental health is a priority area needing urgent attention and action.

First, there are quite a few positives regarding the plan taken from our consultation. These include the creation of specialised services for transcultural young people; shared responsibility between Government and NGO in suicide prevention and targeted responses to high-risk groups; more recovery focused and greater individual choice when navigating the system; increased amount of youth service provision; focus on Multicultural Migrant Resource Centre counseling; increased focus on rural and remote areas; building networks and partnerships and potential for professional development; and, joining up the Mental Health Commission & Department of Alcohol which will ensure transition and continuation of care.

However, there are significant concerns about how effective the plan will be in addressing the unique needs of young people from 'CaLD' backgrounds. These concerns include the need to ensure a greater focus of working with families; the lack of specific funding allocated to developing a range of CALD specific social inclusion strategies that address the recognition of mental health in CALD communities; lack of treatment clinics specific to one target group/community; lack of focus on reducing language barriers when accessing services and

support; no mention of development for youth or multicultural community bed based services; and, the prolonged time taken to expand forensic youth services.

It was identified that the following should be included within the Plan; Increased focus about the impact of domestic violence and torture and trauma; Status Resolution Support Services to allow clients in community detention to access state government funded alcohol and drug services; providing more communication regarding acute services for youth transitioning to adulthood; action to provide an online environment that is youth friendly and user friendly for young people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, YACWA commends the Western Australian Government, Mental Health Commission and all other stakeholders involved in the development of the Plan. The plan clearly identifies young people's mental health as a priority, and acts comprehensively to address this issue amongst this population. However, we now must ensure that the Plan's intentions are fulfilled in their totality. If the proposed aims aren't achieved over the next decade, then we risk jeopardising the lives of young people across Western Australia. The impact of which would be detrimental on the prospects and health of our generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Western Australian Government ensures all necessary funding to fulfill the commitments outlined within the Plan.
2. The Plan brings forward Actions relating to Community Support Services to address urgent demand in our communities,
3. The Plan increases Community bed-based services specifically for young people in rural and remote areas.
4. The Plan increases the appropriateness of hospital bed-based services for children and young people in rural and remote areas.
5. The Plan brings forward commitments relating to Forensic Services for young people.
6. The Plan increases funding to services working with unique groups of young people.