

# **SUMMARY OF THE 2015 EVALUATION MENTAL HEALTH COURT DIVERSION PROGRAM**

## **Background**

The Mental Health Court Diversion Program (the Program) was independently evaluated in 2014. The evaluation made a number of positive findings, including that the Program is operating in accordance with good practice and is highly valued by participants, their families and carers, and stakeholders within the justice system. A summary of the 2014 evaluation can be found [here](#) [web-link].

A key recommendation of the 2014 evaluation was that the pilot Program be extended to enable more data to be collected and further evaluation to be undertaken. In response to this recommendation, the Program's pilot funding was extended for the 2015/16 financial year and a supplementary evaluation was completed in late 2015.

Whereas the 2014 evaluation focused on stakeholder perceptions, the supplementary evaluation sought to quantify the extent to which the Program:

- Improves participants' health and wellbeing;
- Diverts mentally ill offenders away from prison/detention and other criminal sanctions; and
- Improves community safety.

Where relevant data was not already available, these outcomes were measured using additional data collected on an intensive basis between July and September 2015 (the evaluation period). The limited period for which this data was collected means that the resulting findings should be regarded as indicative in nature. The evaluation was carried out by the Mental Health Commission with the support of the partner agencies that contribute to the Program.

## **Summary of findings – Adult Program (Start Court)**

### Service activity

Between its commencement in March 2013 and 30 September 2015, the Start Court received 788 referrals, of which 412 resulted in the referred person receiving support from the Start Court's dedicated clinical team under the supervision of the Start Court Magistrate. A total of 191 individuals entered a formal program of ongoing support, of whom 99 completed the program and 43 were current participants as of 30 September 2015. Reasons for referred persons not proceeding to the assessment or program stages include referral to an alternative diversion program, entering of a plea of not-guilty, and voluntary refusal to engage with the program.

### Health and wellbeing outcomes

Data collected during the evaluation period indicates that:

- 92% of participants were assessed as demonstrating clinical improvement;
- 67% of participants were assessed as being at lower risk of self-harm or suicide;
- 53% of participants reduced or ceased problematic use of alcohol or other drugs; and
- 73% of participants experienced overall improvement in wellbeing (a term that encompasses physical health, relationships and accommodation status).

### Community safety outcomes

Between March 2013 and 30 September 2015, 80% of participants who completed the Start Court program either ceased offending or committed less serious offences after engaging with the program. 62% of those individuals who were assessed for, but did not enter, the Start Court program reoffended compared with 49% of participants who completed the program.

Data collected during the evaluation period indicates that 58% of participants were assessed as posing a lower risk of violence after engaging with the program.

### Diversionsary outcomes

From March 2013 to 30 September 2015, 58 individuals who appeared before the Start Court had all of their charges dismissed for want of prosecution. During the evaluation period, the Start Court Magistrate identified a number of cases in which successful engagement with the Start Court program was treated as a mitigating factor in sentencing including some in which the program provided an alternative to imprisonment. In addition, the Start Court Magistrate identified a number of cases in which the mental health support available through the Start Court enabled a person to be granted bail instead of being remanded in custody.

## **Summary of findings – Children’s Program (Links)**

### Service activity

Between its commencement in April 2013 and 30 September 2015, Links received 655 referrals relating to 431 young people. 84.6% of referrals resulted in a formal mental health assessment. 72.6% of young people referred had no prior history with public mental health services and 94.2% were not currently receiving support from a mental health service.

### Health and wellbeing outcomes

Data collected during the evaluation period indicates that:

- 88.5% of young people case managed by Links were assessed as demonstrating clinical improvement; and
- 86.4% of young people case managed by Links were assessed as being at reduced risk of causing harm to themselves or others.

### Community safety and diversionary outcomes

During the evaluation period, Children's Court Magistrates identified numerous cases in which the support provided by Links contributed to a decision not to remand or sentence a young person to detention. Links was not the subject of a recidivism analysis.

### 2015 Survey results

A survey was conducted to ascertain how effectively Links engages with other agencies, authorities and services that work with young people who are involved in the justice system. The survey found that Links is considered to:

- Be an essential service;
- Complement, rather than duplicate, other services;
- Help other agencies to manage risk effectively; and
- Improve coordination between justice, health and welfare services.