



ADVICE TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR MENTAL HEALTH Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Recruitment Process

2 April 2020

BACKGROUND:


A recruitment process was undertaken in 2018-19 to fill a number of vacancies on the Mental Health Advisory Council (Council). The process involved a traditional approach – completion of an Expression of Interest from which candidates were identified for participation in a group interview. The selection panel comprised the current Council Chair, Margaret Doherty, Council member, Michael Wright, and a representative from the Mental Health Commission (MHC), Renae Hodgson. Successful candidates were identified and their names submitted for the Cabinet approval process. The selection process identified successful applicants from a range of diverse backgrounds. There was agreement that the process was not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders candidates which resulted in a low response from those communities. The importance of having at least one Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander on the Council to provide those perspectives in the development of advice to the Commissioner has been well-established. Given that the current Aboriginal member's tenure, Michael Wright, was due to expire in December 2019, it was critical that a process to recruit at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander member be undertaken.

PREPARATION:

- Michael Wright has agreed to remain on the Council until 30th June 2020 to both assist with recruitment and act in a mentor role to the new candidate, if necessary. The extension of Michael's tenure was agreed to by Cabinet.
- The Elders-in-Residence at the MHC were recruited to advise and to be involved in developing a more culturally appropriate recruitment process. Meetings were held between the Council Chair, the Aboriginal member, MHC representative and the Elders to co-design a culturally appropriate recruitment process.
- An information flyer and selection criteria for the Council role were designed and developed with the Elders.
 - These documents were distributed through appropriate metro and regional networks, the Aboriginal Advisory Group at the MHC, the Council and the Elders networks.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS:

- A morning tea was held on 24th February 2020 and was attended by six Aboriginal applicants and one Torres Strait Islander applicant from a diverse range of backgrounds and locations. Members of the MHC's Aboriginal Advisory Group also attended. The Council Chair and the Aboriginal member, provided an overview of the vision and functions of the Council and its relevance to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Candidates introduced themselves and provided background to their relevant skills, knowledge and reasons for their interest in being selected for the Council role. This was followed by a Q&A session. The tone of the session was informal and welcoming. Participants were welcomed by the Elders on arrival and seating was arranged in a circle. People were then encouraged to chat and mingle.
- Consideration given to both the environment and welcome by the Elders contributed to the willingness for the participants to speak openly and honestly of their personal and professional experiences in mental health and alcohol and other drug areas and their motivations for interest in the Council role.

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- At the end of the session, individuals were asked to register their interest in:
 - (a) the Council role and/or
 - (b) being part of a pool for future possibilities within the MHC.
 - All candidates registered their interest in both options.
 - Feedback about this part of the process has been very positive.
 - The Elders and the panel met directly after the morning tea and agreed to a shift in the process to accommodate five individuals who had expressed interest but had been unable to attend on that date. It was agreed that these individuals would be given the opportunity to meet with the panel and the Elders on the day previously identified for one-to-one meetings.
 - On 4th March 2020, one-to-one meetings occurred with these five candidates, the Elders and the panel.
 - Following this meeting, the panel and the Elders selected:
 - ✓ Two candidates to be put forward for Council vacancies (as a second Council vacancy had become likely due to the possible unavailability of an approved candidate from the initial recruitment process). The necessary paperwork is now being prepared for Cabinet submission.
 - ✓ Candidates to be included in future Council and/or MHC recruitment pools.

REFLECTIONS:

- A culturally secure recruitment process will increase the responsiveness of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander candidates for positions on MHC committees and related Councils and Advisory bodies. Such a process needs to be co-produced with Elders and relevant members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The learnings from the recruitment process for the Council are informing the recruitment process for Aboriginal consumer and carer representatives on the Start Court. This is an exciting development.
- During the process, the Elders identified changes in the recruitment process. The first part would be unchanged with a morning tea/information session/circle process. The second part would involve candidates participating in a group session around a board table simulating the conditions in which a candidate would be required to participate.

ADVICE:

Given the above, Council recommends that:

- That the MHC integrate the learnings from the Council recruitment process and implement these learning for a culturally secure recruitment policy for future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vacancies on MHC committees and related councils and advisory bodies.
- That the MHC builds on the connections made with the community through these processes to strengthen the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in its work and to assist in the development and delivery of culturally appropriate mental health and alcohol and other drug services and responses.

Sincerely



Margaret Doherty

CHAIR

2 April 2020