

ADVICE TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Advisory Council & the Alcohol and Other Drug Advisory Board Joint Advice Re: Young People Priority Framework

9 November 2020


BACKGROUND


The Mental Health Advisory Council (the Council) and the Alcohol and Other Drug Advisory Board (the Board) came together as part of the scheduled Council meeting on 8th October 2020. The purpose was to receive a briefing by Natasa Dale, Assistant Director Strategic Policy at the Mental Health Commission (MHC) regarding the Young People Priorities Framework (YPPF) which is currently under development. The following Advice is congruent with the extensive verbal feedback given to Ms Dale at the time of the briefing. The Council also had a later presentation from the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA).

ADVICE

Given the above, the Council and the Board provide the following advice:

- The Council and Board acknowledge the work which the MHC team is doing to examine and include information and findings from relevant recent reports and other work in this area.
- The impact of COVID-19 on young people is significant. YACWA provided statistics from a survey of 345 young people that found that 91% of young people had mental health difficulties with 44% losing income and 38% unable to buy essentials. While WA's unemployment rate was 8.3% in July 2020, the youth unemployment rate has risen to 16.3%. Barriers to accessing and maintaining engagement in education, employment and training will have a longer term 'career scarring' effect. The Framework therefore needs to be premised on the current situation with regard to COVID-19 which while its general trajectory is unpredictable the disproportionate significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people is already being seen.
- It is understood that the age range which the YPPF will cover is 12-25. Given the incredible diversity in need and autonomy within that range, the Framework will need to specifically address shorter age ranges in order to have meaningful application at different stages of development.
- The Council recognises the limitations of the starting age of twelve years for this framework and strongly supports the targeting of specific work on the needs of younger children.

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- There is also acknowledgement of the broad consultation which is planned to take place within an extremely tight timeframe given the breadth, complexity and importance of this work. There was significant concern raised about the limitations this tight timeline would place on the quality of the feedback which could be gathered, particularly from diverse groups including young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, ethnic minority, LGBTIQ and other under-represented communities.
 - The profile of alcohol and other drug use needs to be raised within the YPPF both as a standalone issue and also within the co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug area.
 - Broader consultation with alcohol and other drug agencies, consumers, families and significant others is recommended.
 - Focus (and investment) is required across the spectrum from prevention to acute services. If the focus or investment is only on acute / crisis services, the situation for young people will not improve.
 - Access to the perspectives of young people and family members and supporters of young people who have, or are experiencing detention or involvement in the criminal justice system is critical. The life trajectory faced by many of these vulnerable young people without appropriate individual and family support, intervention and programs is dire.
 - Given that young people at age 18 will enter an adult corrections system significant attention to and investment in diversion programs and essential community supports such as a range of accommodation options is required.
 - The issue of risk mitigation in the mental health and alcohol and other drug areas is seen as significant and requires to be operationalised through recovery-based, trauma-competent, culturally appropriate lenses. This is particularly true when seeking to address the needs of young people who are experiencing a number of intersecting issues such as poverty, alienation or exclusion from school, disability / cognitive impairment, family and domestic violence. The overall impact of any number of these serious issues is much greater than if they are responded to separately.
 - Given the obvious impact of social determinants on the mental health and alcohol and other drug use of young people, it is critical that the Framework is shaped by this understanding.
 - Effective change will require close cross-government and agency collaboration and accountability. One example cited was the need for a range of suitable accommodation options for young people which will vary significantly across the 12-25 age group.
 - What already works well? Applying a strengths-based lens and prioritising feedback from young people who access services will help to identify services and programs which are already doing great work with young people. One example cited was the Links program at Perth Magistrates Court which seeks to divert young people to treatment and support. However, despite being in place for some years, it is still operating on pilot funding.

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- A discussion was had about the appetite of government to resource what is required for young people to become or remain contributing and healthy members of the WA community. It is hoped that the appetite is real and that the Framework will help to identify key areas and programs which require support and resourcing in order to make the most difference in the health and wellbeing of young people in WA.

Sincerely



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Mental Health Advisory Council
9 NOVEMBER 2020



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CHAIR
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9 NOVEMBER 2020