



ADVICE TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Inclusion of collective peer support and self-help group voice in strategic consultations and decision-making

March 2021

BACKGROUND

Mental Health Advisory Council (Council) members received a presentation on Thursday 11 March 2021 from ConnectGroups, a specialist peak body for peer support and self-help groups in Western Australia. A copy of the presentation is attached to this Advice for your information.

It was clear to Council members that the work undertaken by ConnectGroups in bringing together voices of individuals and families in the mental health and broader health areas and providing support to them in developing their own peer support groups has a strong and clear congruence with the Recovery approach in mental health reflecting principles of Connectedness, Choice and Control, Meaning and Purpose, Empowerment and Hopefulness. The work also reflects the principles of the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan (2015-2025) and the 2018 Sustainable Health Review.

The work of ConnectGroups as a specialist peak body advocating for the collective voices of lived and living experience to be listened to, supported and effectively responded to is particularly critical given the value which peer support groups offer in generating and delivering culturally-secure, community-determined, place-based solutions. An important consideration is that ConnectGroups supports many peer support groups in the physical health area which is an overlapping area often neglected for people with diagnoses of severe mental illnesses. In the mental health area, the work of ConnectGroups is predominantly supported by the Mental Health Commission-funded Pay It Forward and Dream It Forward grants program. These small grants allow fledgling grassroots groups to be supported to form; design and deliver initiatives that are important for their communities.

Examples of Funded initiatives:

The use of these grants with under-serviced communities such as the LGBTIQ community which has evidenced higher levels of self-harm and suicide has resulted in innovative initiatives such as the Alternatives to Suicide program, offered by TransFolk WA.

Another example is Val and Kathy's Crafty Kitchen, Roebourne which supports local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community to connect through healthy meals, social and cultural events. The latter program was the 2021 Winner of WA Council of Social Services Community Service Excellence Awards Category (Regional Organisation).

These programs provide innovative examples of the mental health prevention and support work which can be gained from working with communities in a targeted, supported and culturally secure way.



ADVICE/RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the above, the Council provide the following recommendations:

- ConnectGroups is invited to participate in strategic consultation and decision-making forums to ensure the state-wide, collective voice of peer support groups is represented;
- Given the current increased demand for mental health services, the Mental Health Commission liaise with ConnectGroups to maximise their existing partnerships with grassroots social, cultural and geographic communities, to develop and deliver local responses particularly for those communities where current services are minimal or do not exist; and
- The Mental Health Commission consider strengthening partnerships with ConnectGroups and LinkWest (peak body for Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres) to develop and deliver initiatives particularly to under-represented communities with evidenced higher levels of mental distress and in small rural and remote settings which may not have access to mental health services.

Sincerely



Margaret Doherty

CHAIR

Mental Health Advisory Council

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