

Introduction

The South Australian Mental Health Commission (the Commission) was established by the South Australian Government with a key initial task of leading the development of the South Australian Mental Health Strategic Plan (the Plan). A draft of the Plan is due for completion in August 2017 and the final Plan in October 2017.

The aim of the Plan is to provide an integrated whole-of-person, whole-of-life, whole-of-community and whole-of-government approach to building, sustaining and strengthening the mental health and wellbeing of South Australians.

The Commission is in the process of finding out what is currently happening around mental health and wellbeing in SA, and what the needs are.

What this paper is about?

This paper is a summary of what we heard from over 2,270 South Australians who shared their ideas on mental health and wellbeing in order for us (the Commission) to develop SA's Mental Health Strategic plan. We have analysed the information given to us and identified key themes.

The Commission heard from 147 people who contributed via submissions, 1,175 who participated in 176 community conversations held across the State, and 952 people responding to an online survey. The Commission also reached approximately 456,000 South Australians through social media.

Our conversations included people with lived experience of mental health issues, their carers and friends, people working in the mental health system, in hospitals and the community, in the health system more broadly, in other areas of government, in the private sector, in non-government organisations, from community groups, and people with no direct experience of mental health issues or services but who provided comment on mental health and wellbeing. They also included people from country as well as metropolitan locations, Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, defence and veterans' communities, first responders, education providers and students, gender and sexually diverse (GSD) people, children and young people, older persons, forensic mental health and corrections workers, unions and industrial bodies.

How did we hear from people?

We sought feedback from South Australians in a range of ways including:

- > Direct submissions invited via our website, Facebook page, yourSAy, on-line chat, direct email or post
- > Community conversations with a broad range of stakeholder groups and community representatives
- > Facilitated or 'Do-It-Yourself' (DIY) options included small or large group conversations, community forums, creation of art, poems, comics, zines, stories, photos or videos, pop-up stalls or any other techniques which people felt would capture their feedback.
- > An on-line survey

What did we ask?

We asked people to let us know:

- > What is working with respect to promotion of mental health and/or prevention or support for mental ill-health
- > What is not working so well
- > What might the future look like?

Summary of key themes

Theme 1: Importance of promotion, prevention and early-in-life intervention

There is a call for a coordinated approach to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing and early-in-life intervention with the aim of building and sustaining wellbeing, preventing mental ill-health and reducing its impact across the lifespan wherever possible, in homes, schools, universities, workplaces, and in the community.

Subthemes

In homes and our communities there is work happening to support infants and families, but maybe more can be done in the early years; much was told to the Commission about the value and importance of early in life intervention


- > In schools and universities there is work happening to build wellbeing and resilience, but there is a need for a coordinated approach that meets the needs of all children and young people, and a call for qualified counsellors to be available in all South Australian schools
- > Workplaces can greatly impact mental health and wellbeing, and there is a need to build on work already occurring to generate and grow mentally healthy workplaces in SA
- > Older people need support not only to remain physically well, but also to remain mentally well
- > Loneliness and isolation are widespread and people are crying out for a sense of community connectedness and wellbeing

Theme 2: Community education to improve awareness and reduce stigma

There is a call for widespread community education to improve awareness around mental health and mental illness, reduce stigma and discrimination and associated suffering, and to increase people's understanding of when, where and how to seek help.

Subthemes

- > Greater community awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing has the potential to improve people's lives by reducing stigma and shame currently associated with



mental ill-health, and by increasing people's willingness and ability to help others and seek help themselves

- > It may be timely to rethink the language and definitions used around mental wellbeing, mental health and mental illness in order to reduce confusion and mitigate potential harm from misunderstanding

Theme 3: Services that work better together

There is a call for integrated service delivery which recognises social and other determinants of mental health problems, and aims to meet whole-of-person and whole-of-life needs and improve mental health outcomes.

Subthemes

- > There is a call for greater integration between health and mental health services to reflect the relationship between physical health, mental health, and drug and alcohol misuse
- > There is a call for greater integration across multiple service sectors and providers to ensure that people receive the care and services they need and do not fall through cracks in the system
- > Social determinants such as being able to access safe secure housing, a regular income, meaningful activity and supportive relationships continue to substantially impact prevention and recovery outcomes

Theme 4: Ensuring access to the right care at the right time in the right place

There is a call for much greater clarity and simplicity for people experiencing mental ill-health, and their families and carers, around how to access timely and appropriate supports. These supports must be suited to their needs, and be available across a service continuum involving hospital, community or home based support, with appropriate referral and follow-up measures in place.

Subthemes

- > People told the Commission of the difficulty in knowing where and how to access appropriate and timely help for mental health issues, ranging from mild distress to crisis to ongoing community support
- > Many people reported that they cannot access or afford the primary mental health care services they need
- > There is a call for integrated services offering a continuum of care suited to the needs of the person at the time, aiming to 'intervene before the crisis' wherever possible, and provide crisis care, rehabilitation and ongoing support for those who need it
- > There is growing support for sustainable services run by not-for-profit organisations, and recognition of community groups that provide lower intensity support and services aimed at hospital avoidance

Theme 5: Providing services that better meet people's needs

There is a call for more services and supports that are focused on understanding and meeting the needs of each individual and their families or carers. These services need to provide a range of interventions and support options responding to need, ensure staff are trained and supported to provide person-centred care, and that systems are in place to facilitate referral and follow-up between services as required.

Subthemes


- > People are all different, and their own backgrounds, experiences, cultures and preferences impact the type of care they need; wherever possible people want to be given the opportunity to participate in and guide their own care planning
- > A range of options for support and care need to be offered to meet individual needs at different times, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach; medication is important for many people, but equally so are a range of other options and interventions
- > Alternative workforce models, including expanded peer workforce roles and peer led services, may assist in providing timely and appropriate access to care and support
- > Families and carers of people experiencing mental illness often feel inadequately supported or excluded from decisions, despite playing a key role in the provision of ongoing care and support in many cases
- > Systems, staff and volunteers working with or responding to people with mental health issues, particularly those who work outside mental health services, may not always have sufficient training or understanding in the areas of mental health, trauma, crisis, recovery and/or person-centred care to allow them to be able to respond skilfully and compassionately to people experiencing mental distress
- > For many people with ongoing mental health issues, continuity of care is important in order to build a therapeutic relationships

Theme 6: Targeted responses

There are many groups in the South Australian population who have diverse needs or may be at higher risk of experiencing factors which impact mental health or access to appropriate care and support. These groups require targeted approaches for prevention of, and intervention for, mental health issues.

Subthemes

- > Key life transition points including starting school, primary to secondary school, school leavers, new parents, workforce leavers, and those going from retirement to aged care, are times where individuals can be vulnerable to mental health issues
- > Different age groups including infants, children, youth, young adults, working age and older age, may require targeted approaches to prevention and intervention, and may be particularly vulnerable to transition between current age-based service models

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- > Other population groups at higher risk of having or developing mental health issues, or with diverse needs who may require a targeted response, include people in rural and remote locations, Aboriginal people, people from CALD communities, people who are gender and/or sexually diverse, children in out-of-home care, other at-risk children, care leavers, prisoners, veterans, first responders, people who have attempted suicide or who are bereaved by suicide, and carers of people with mental illness
 - > People who experience particular kinds of mental illness may require targeted and ongoing support; these may include people with severe and complex mental illness, borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, and people experiencing co-existing mental illness, substance misuse or other co-morbidities

Theme 7: Planning, funding and monitoring

There is a call for clear and sustainable funding models which support innovation, sharing and excellence in service provision. People want clear and accountable leadership and governance structures for mental health reform and service oversight, a culture within mental health services which fosters excellence in person-centred care, and agreed performance indicators which can be broadly applied and measure meaningful information.

Subthemes

- > Current funding models do not always recognise the importance of continuity of service provider, or encourage sharing and/or innovation
- > Alongside reports of mental health services working well, many mental health service staff are frustrated by their inability to provide what they believe is integrated, holistic, person centred and recovery oriented care due to what was reported as risk-averse cultures, lack of available and consistent training opportunities, and inadequate clinical time available for building therapeutic relationships
- > People asked for strong leadership and clear governance, responsibility and accountability for a whole-of-government approach to mental health and wellbeing, with mechanisms in place to oversee resourcing and implementation of government-wide strategic actions
- > It would be helpful if data collections and performance indicators were applicable to all services, collected meaningful and useful information, and connected the person's journey between as well as within services