



National Mental Health Commission Meeting

31 July – 2 August 2018

COMMUNIQUE

The National Mental Health Commission held a meeting on Tuesday 31 July to Thursday 2 August 2018 in Newcastle, New South Wales. National Mental Health Commissioners welcomed engagement and discussion on mental health and suicide prevention in the Hunter region. The discussions focused on mental health and suicide prevention research and mental health in the farming and mining industries. National Mental Health Commissioners valued hearing the experiences of consumers, carers, service providers and sector stakeholders at the forums.

Forums for mental health and suicide prevention

Commissioners attended two forums - one with stakeholders from various sectors and another with consumers, carers, service providers and community mental health organisations. At each forum local issues, challenges and successes were discussed.

Commissioners were briefed about trial programs involving Ambulance, Police and mental health services using videoconferencing to complete triage for people who may need mental health services and were in rural locations. This program assisted people to stay in their own homes with community support. The Commissioners also heard of the positive outcomes in relation to long-term residents from Morrissett Hospital being transitioned to the NDIS. Some challenges with information exchange were identified between the justice and health sectors, and opportunities for greater collaboration were agreed. Commissioners heard about the demand for mental health services in the region and the challenges with workforce in rural areas.

The focus of discussions at the community forum centred on suicide prevention for people of all ages and the challenges for first responders and other people with post-traumatic stress disorder and their families. Concerns were raised about the difficulties in navigating the health system, the challenges in meeting increased demand for mental health services in schools, and the availability of funding for community-based services.

Everymind

Commissioners met with staff from Everymind and were briefed about several of their programs. Everymind has a leadership role in one of the NSW LifeSpan trials. Commissioners heard about the different approaches to suicide prevention programs through the projects funded by the NSW Government and the Commonwealth including application of the elements of the models to meet the priorities of the community. As part of the work, the project team have been engaging with the Hunter New England Central Coast Primary Health Network along with indigenous services to ensure the project reaches the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Lack of availability of timely data is an issue that impacts on the implementation of the model.

Mindframe, *Life in Mind* and the *National Communications Charter* are other suicide prevention programs being undertaken by Everymind. *Mindframe* is focussed on the safe reporting and communications about suicide, mental ill-health and alcohol and other drugs by working with university students, news media organisations and companies producing television, documentaries and other media with fictional portrayal of these issues. *Life in Mind* involves a portal which connects organisations and communities to current information and resources on suicide prevention. The Prevention Hub is an integrated research initiative of Everymind and the Black Dog Institute focussed on preventing anxiety and depression. Commissioners were briefed on some specific aspects of the Prevention Hub including the workplace research, in particular with small businesses and programs for families and young people.

Farming and mental health

Commissioners met with representatives of organisations working with farmers and rural communities to discuss mental health and suicide prevention issues. Representatives from the NSW Department of Primary Industries, Rural Financial Counsellors, Hunter Local Land Services and Catholic Care Social Services Hunter Manning, briefed Commissioners on the current challenges in rural NSW due to the drought.

Commissioners heard that many organisations were working with farmers and communities, to support their businesses and their wellbeing. Some of the challenges for people to receiving mental health services included their desire to receive face-to-face services being balanced with the difficulty for them to leave their properties. Some service delivery organisations provide on-farm services such as the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health's *Rural Adversity Mental Health Program* (RAMHP). The RAMHP has coordinators based across NSW who provide specialist knowledge and support for people in rural communities experiencing mental health issues. Commissioners also heard of the challenges for people running businesses in drought-affected communities and the need to continue to support them. Resilience training for staff delivering services and those affected by drought and other natural disasters is important, as are strategies to increase social networking and self-efficacy.

Mining and mental health

Representatives from Mates in Mining, Glencore and the University of Newcastle met with Commissioners to discuss mental health in the mining industry. Commissioners were briefed on the development of initiatives to address the mental health needs of workers initially in the coal industry and its growth from there. Commissioners heard that miners were found to have significantly higher levels of psychological distress than people in the population. The data was similar for fly-in-fly-out miners and miners who lived locally. Programs across the mining industry to increase mental health literacy have resulted in increasing rates of help-seeking and increased participation rates for people with mental illness. Commissioners were also informed about the Mates in Mining program and its work in suicide prevention through training staff to offer help.