



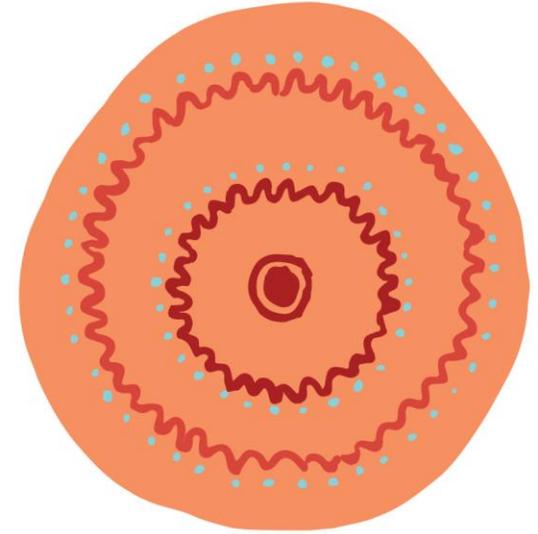
**Australian Government**

**National Mental Health Commission**

**Wollongong, NSW**

**28 August 2019**

**Making  
Connections**  
with your  
Mental Health  
and Wellbeing



**35 Participants**

This snapshot identifies key points from the  
Town Hall Meeting

Content from all Town Hall Meetings is being  
collated by the Commission



# Help Seeking

Participants were asked what stops them or someone they know from seeking help.

Direct comments included:

- 'Lack of knowledge and acceptance which makes people frightened of other people with mental illness'
- 'Basically, the way we work out who we are is through other people and what they think of us'
- 'As a mum, I didn't get help because I didn't know I needed help. But also, if I stepped up and said I needed help, then who would step into the role of being a mum?'
- 'Everyone's experiences are very different, so it is hard to know what to look out for'
- 'Once I went into a shopfront centre to get a bite to eat and I had a chat there and that probably saved my life. It's about connection'
- 'I wasn't in a place to advocate for myself, I didn't know what I needed but my family weren't allowed to speak on behalf of me and get information about me! Families need to be the go-to person'
- 'The mental health system works as quickly as possible to get you off the books, so it isn't any longer a problem. But what if it takes 6 sessions just to work out what you may be experiencing, and then you only have 4 sessions left to 'fix' it?'

# Help Seeking

Direct comments included – continued:

- 'People not being welcoming or understanding of what is happening'
- 'Fear of being involuntarily scheduled into a public hospital'
- 'Lack of trust in the system, feeling that it's a broken system'
- 'Shame and stigma of "not coping on your own"'
- 'Domestic violence, non supportive environments, lack of personal support'
- 'Clinical "one size fits all" approach, tick box'
- 'Services are not culturally safe'
- 'Don't want to put pressure on an already overworked system'

# Help Seeking

Participants were asked what stops them or someone they know from seeking help.

Discussion points included:

- Shame, stigma and fear of judgement are major barriers to reaching out
- Stigma coming from a lack of knowledge of what mental illness means, and the language and terms used around disorders and conditions
- Generational mental illness that affects each family member individually and cumulatively
- Not feeling safe when seeking help or when being put in treatment facilities
- Funding puts real limits on access and continuous help, with cost mentioned repeatedly by participants
- Not knowing where to start seeking help or which door to try to open
- Previous bad experiences with hospitals, discharge processes and the lack of follow-up support

# Big Ideas or Initiatives

Participants were asked for one big idea or initiative to improve mental health in their community.

Direct comments included:

- 'Utilise Community Centres as central places of programmed, regular meet-ups for people to chat about their lives'
- '24 hour drop-in centres with peer support workers where people can have a coffee and chat with another person who understands'
- 'Transitional care teams need greater investment in the case management level to provide a supportive environment when people are released so that the investment in acute treatment and care is effective'
- 'Mandatory mental health training for all students (self care, what mental health is, where to get help)'
- 'Funding, funding, funding for uncapped care plans – linked to a stepped care model'
- 'Programs focused on men in society and toxic masculinity – looking to prevent aggression, violence and suicide as the only options for expressing feelings'
- 'Prevention programs based on connection and support, to address loneliness'

# Big Ideas or Initiatives

Direct comments included – continued:

- 'Yearly, incentivised, Medicare funded, counsellor visit for everyone from the age of 14, where you don't have to be assessed by your GP. This would give people a chance to make a contact in the mental health field and more importantly, normalise mental health care'
- 'Perhaps a Mental Health Board appointed in each community by the community, with specific Government funding to encourage connection'
- 'Funding into free workshops for family and loved ones of the mentally ill to train them in how to support their loved one'
- 'Transform Emergency Departments to have different compassionate recovery oriented pathways for mental health professionals'
- 'Education about therapy and mental health as well as proactive self care solutions in schools from kindergarten up'
- 'Foster communities and community capacity building. How can we bring together areas of society? Back to basics, community parks, chats and community centres'
- 'Investment in "It's OK to be not OK" – community funding, Government policy for mental health leave, media advertising, etc'

# Big Ideas or Initiatives

Participants were asked for one big idea or initiative to improve mental health in their community.

Discussion points included:

- We are capturing people in acute illness (the 5%) but missing out on supporting many more people to keep them out of acute illness and hospitalisation
- Nature is a cure for mental health. Getting under a forest, with a stream, birds and really connecting with the land to free the mind and to create spaces for people to speak to qualified workers whilst connecting back to nature
- Tailored suicide awareness training, especially for minority groups and for youth
- Mental health days ingrained in the workforce in the same way as sick leave and domestic violence leave are accepted
- That the family is told if suicidal thoughts are expressed and the family becomes the support system, in the same way as other social issues or challenges
- The importance of providing places where people can go to chat about an issue being dealt with at the time; the 'drop-in' culture is about "hey I just need to chat to someone about something I am currently feeling and that might get me through today"

# The Developing Vision

Participants were asked for key aspects to be included in the vision of a new system.

Responses included:

- Community
- Mental fitness
- Volunteers
- Recovery is probable
- Validation
- Make mental health 'sexy'
- It takes a village to raise a child and it should be so for mental illness
- Age should not be a barrier to letting family know that someone is at risk of suicide
- Normalising mental health means normalising mental health care
- It is actually OK to have a mental illness

# Thank You, Wollongong

The Commission thanks the community for their comments and suggestions on improving our mental health system

## Ways to stay connected:

- ✓ Attend a Town Hall meeting
- Read the snapshots from your community and other communities in Australia
- Take the survey online (on our website)
- Follow us on Facebook (@NMHCAustralia) and Twitter (@NMHC)
- Join the conversation online using #ConnectingWithYou

[www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au)

