

National Mental Health Commission Meeting 24 – 27 October 2017

COMMUNIQUE

The National Mental Health Commission held its 39th meeting from Tuesday 24 - Friday 27 October 2017 in Broome, Western Australia. National Mental Health Commissioners engaged with consumers, carers, community members, service providers and government agencies and participated in discussions on mental health and suicide prevention in rural and remote Western Australia.

Beagle Bay community

Commissioners travelled to the community of Beagle Bay, north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsular. Commissioners, who met with staff from the Kimberley Mental Health and Drug Service and met with a community elder, heard about the establishment of the missionary community and the current mental health services available through the Aboriginal Medical Service community centre and the outreach service provided from the Kimberley Mental Health and Drug Service based in Broome.

Western Australian Rural and Remote Mental Health Conference

Commissioners attended the Rural and Remote Mental Health Conference, titled 'We're in it together'. The conference was attended by more than 300 delegates from across Western Australia from clinical and community services; public and private services; non-government organisations, WA Country Health Service and the Department of Health. Commissioners welcomed the opportunity to engage with a broad range of individuals and hear about their experiences, work and commitment to improve mental health outcomes in Western Australia, and particularly in rural and remote communities.

The Commission was involved in the conference in a number of ways: as a sponsor, in a panel discussion and with a keynote address given by Co-Chair Professor Allan Fels AO.

The panel discussion enabled the Commissioners to respond to questions from the delegates in relation to the theme '*Complications of service delivery: When competition and collaboration are in the mix – how do we all work together for everyone's mental health?*'. The Commissioners responded to questions regarding the challenge of providing services in a competitive environment in small, rural and remote communities; the importance of organisations interacting and sharing their experiences of what works and what doesn't; the changing environment in which community managed organisations are operating and the demand for data and reporting; the importance of peer support; and the importance of an increased focus on local, culturally appropriate suicide prevention programs.

Professor Fels spoke on the topic '*Regional Mental Health System Reform: Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities*'. During his presentation, Professor Fels addressed the mental health challenges of people living with a mental illness in remote, rural and regional areas of the Kimberley region and Western Australia. Professor Fels revealed it was a key recommendation of the Commission's 2014 *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities Review* for improved access to services using innovative technologies such as telehealth support (e-mental health services) as 90 per cent of Australia's mental health services are located in metropolitan areas. Professor Fels explained that telehealth now plays an important role in mental health treatment in country Australia, allowing service professionals to offer more high-quality appointments with psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in areas where it would otherwise be impossible. Professor Fels also highlighted the need to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health not only within the Kimberley, but throughout all aspects of the Commission's work. The Kimberley is one of 12 suicide prevention trial sites across Australia and additionally the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan incorporates effective suicide prevention with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Commissioners participated in the numerous concurrent sessions which focussed on issues relevant to mental health in rural and remote areas such as suicide prevention, recovery, indigenous mental health and wellbeing, consumer led initiatives, youth, digital health, stepped care and co-morbidities. Commissioners engaged in the discussions in these sessions and were able to hear from the delegates of the challenges and successes in meeting the needs of their communities.

The Commissioners also had the opportunity to meet with The Hon. Alanna Therese Clohesy MLC Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Health and Mental Health, The Hon. Alison Xamon MLC and the Board and Executive staff from the WA Country Health Service. Commissioners were briefed on the challenges in service delivery in rural and remote areas of WA and initiatives to enhance services for the community.