

National Mental Health Commission
August 2022

Feedback on the Better Access initiative second draft interim report



Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

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The Commission commends the overall quality of the draft interim report, its methodology and data. The Commission acknowledges that much of the feedback provided on the first draft interim report has been incorporated into the second draft interim report. The Commission suggests the next iteration of the draft report could be strengthened through:

- greater exploration of barriers to uptake and efficacy of Better Access for older people, including aged care residents
- exploring the impact of recent changes to the Better Access initiative
- greater analysis of disaggregated data and expansion of study six (qualitative Interviews with people with lived experience of mental illness)

The Commission emphasises the Importance that study eight – a consultative virtual forum on future reforms to Better Access - Include strong representation from people with lived experience of mental illness, carers, family and kin, and takes a contemporary rights and recovery approach to any proposed reforms.

About the National Mental Health Commission

The National Mental Health Commission (the Commission) provides cross-sectoral leadership on policy, programs, services and systems that support better mental health and social and emotional wellbeing in Australia. There are three main strands to the Commission's work: monitoring and reporting on Australia's mental health and suicide prevention system; providing independent advice to government and the community; and acting as a catalyst for change.

The Commission's underpinning principle is the Contributing Life Framework. This framework acknowledges that a fulfilling life requires more than just access to health care services. It means that people who experience mental ill health can expect the same rights, opportunities, physical and mental health outcomes as the wider community.

Vision 2030: Blueprint for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (Vision 2030) is a blueprint for a successful, connected mental health and suicide prevention system to meet the needs of all Australians. As part of the federal Department of Health's 10-year plan, it takes a long term approach to change and improvement.

Vision 2030 has been delivered through a unified system that takes a whole-of-community, whole-of-life and person-centred approach to mental health; a vision to provide easily navigated, coordinated and balanced community-based services that are offered early to meet each individual's needs and prevent escalating concerns.

Feedback

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Better Access Initiative second draft interim evaluation report.

The Commission commends the overall quality of the draft interim report, its methodology and data.

The Commission notes that much of our feedback on the first draft interim report is reflected in the second draft interim report, including through:

- Clearer articulation of the purpose and intent of the research, including more information about previous reviews. The inclusion of a table showing how the different studies address different research questions is particularly useful.
- Greater acknowledgement of the limitations of each study and exploration of alternative explanations for data findings.
- Greater analysis of disaggregated data to explore differences between cohorts.
- Inclusion of analysis linking and triangulating data across different studies to address specific research questions.

The Commission suggests the next iteration of the interim report could be further strengthened through:

1. **Greater exploration of barriers to uptake and efficacy of Better Access for older people, including aged care residents.**

The Commission recommends the researchers consider expanding the study into Better Access in aged care settings beyond expansion of studies 3 & 6 (focused on consumer insights) to also expand study 7 (survey with providers) to better understand the barriers to delivering Better Access in aged care settings.

The Commission further recommends that the exploration of Better Access for aged care residents go beyond aged care to also probe more deeply into the evidence emerging from the evaluation around lower uptake and poorer outcomes for older people more broadly.

2. **Greater analysis of disaggregated data and expansion of study six (qualitative Interviews with people with lived experience of mental illness).**

The Commission notes preliminary results reported in this interim report regarding older populations, the relative severity of initial symptoms and the educational level of some consumers. The Commission further notes and the reported low uptake by males, which is of particular relevance given Australian males are consistently overrepresented among suicide deaths at 2.7 times the rate of females.

The Commission recommends data from the studies be further analysed to elicit greater understanding of issues emerging from the data about those consumer cohorts that appear less likely to benefit from Better Access. In particular, the Commission recommends further examination, and potential expansion of study six, to better understand access barriers and poorer results or deterioration for men and older people. The Commission would also be interested in understanding whether the low uptake by males holds across age groups. The Commission suggest this would also be useful for other cohorts, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Commission further recommends that study 6 – qualitative interviews with people with lived experience of mental illness - be expanded to seek input from a greater diversity of people with lived experience, including a greater proportion of men and older people, as well as carers, family and kin.

3. Explore the impact of recent changes to the Better Access initiative

The Commission notes the inclusion of new information acknowledging recent changes to Better Access in place until 31 December 2022. However, the Commission is of the view that in its current form, the evaluation misses the opportunity to understand how these recent changes to Better Access have, or have not, improved access. The Commission recommends the evaluation explicitly explore the impact of recent temporary changes/expansions of the Better Access initiative on uptake and user experience, including any differences between different cohorts of users.

4. Contemporary rights and recovery approach to study eight - a consultative virtual forum on future reforms to Better Access

The Commission recommends the approach to study eight – a consultative virtual forum on future reforms to Better Access - take a deliberate rights and recovery approach, with full and equal representation from people with lived experience of mental illness and carers, family and kin.