



**Mental
Health
Council**
OF TASMANIA

Feedback for the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework

Address: Level 1, 131a Collins Street Hobart TAS 7000

Contact: 03 6224 9222

Connie Digolis, CEO cdigolis@mhct.org

Prepared by: Kaitlyn Graham, Project Officer kgraham@mhct.org

Date: 20 August 2018

Pre-amble

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) is a member based peak body. We represent and promote the interests of community managed mental health services and have a strong commitment to enabling better mental health and wellbeing outcomes for every Tasmanian.

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Outcomes Framework for Child and Youth Wellbeing. MHCT commends the framework for highlighting that mental health is as equally integral to a young person's health and wellbeing as their physical health. We note that our responses are informed by consultation with our members and relate specifically to the provision of mental health specific measures. Furthermore, MHCT wishes to acknowledge that whilst The Framework has not specifically outlined an age bracket, our feedback has been written based upon the recognition that many organisations and agencies recognise a young person to be up to the age of 25.

The mental health of children and young people is key to their overall well-being, and mental ill-health impacts on a number of young Tasmanians. The second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that 13.9% children and adolescents aged 4-17 years experienced a mental disorder between 2013-14, which is equivalent to an estimated 560,000 Australian children and adolescents. As such, whilst MHCT is pleased to see that the framework has acknowledged the importance of mental health, MHCT believes that the outcomes framework is significantly lacking in many crucial mental health specific outcome indicators for children and young people throughout Tasmania. Currently, the outcomes framework lists just one indicator under the "Tasmanian children and young people are mentally, emotionally and spiritually healthy" section of the framework, with that being:

3.3.1: Deaths of 5-17 year olds due to intentional self harm

Whilst it is important to capture data on suicide rates of young people within Tasmania, this data in isolation of other mental health indicators will not accurately represent how mentally healthy Tasmania's young people are, or how the mental health of young people is contributing to their overall state of well-being. Whilst suicide rates do show the number of deaths which have occurred due to mental ill-health, they do not capture other key indicators of mental well-being, including the number

of young Tasmanians currently living with a mental health condition and how this impacts on their well-being, or the availability and accessibility of mental health supports for young people.

As the outcomes framework provides "the basis for Government agencies to ensure that a focus on child and youth wellbeing informs the design and delivery of government services" it is important that the mental health of young people is accurately measured and considered.

The World Health Organisation, on the importance of mental health, states "Mental health is an integral part of health; indeed, there is no health without mental health." In line with this, MHCT believes that the mental health of children and young people is an inherent feature of their overall well-being, and by only measuring the suicide rates of young people, the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework will not accurately capture the current mental well-being of Tasmania's young people. As such, MHCT proposes that the framework includes a range of other mental health specific indicators to provide a more comprehensive picture.

Proposed Indicators

To ensure that the impact that mental health has on the overall wellbeing of children and young people within Tasmania is represented, MHCT believes that the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework would benefit from including a range of mental health specific indicators. By including more indicators relating to mental health, progress towards outcome 3.3, “Tasmanian children and young people are mentally, emotionally and spiritually healthy” can be more accurately measured. As such, MHCT is proposing the following additional indicators:

3.3.2 Percentage of school students accessing mental health education programs

3.3.3 Percentage of target population who self-rate feeling “happy” to “very happy” in reference to their life as a whole

3.3.4 Percentage of Tasmanian children and young people accessing care under a mental health plan, both new and continuing

3.3.5 Number of children and young people accessing in-school supports for mental health concerns

3.3.6 Rates of children and young people accessing community based mental health supports, and rates of young people returning for further care

3.3.7 Rates of children and young people admitted to hospital with mental health concerns, and readmission rates

Further to the proposed additional indicators, MHCT has, in accordance with the layout of the Framework, also provided the rationale for these additional indicators, including information on why these indicators are important to measure, and potential data sources.

Percentage of school students accessing mental health education programs

Why is this important?

Schools play an influential role in the lives of young people of all ages, and are key in providing young Tasmanians with mental health specific education programs. Health programs are a prominent feature of the Australian curriculum, and mental health specific education programs are vital in raising awareness, decreasing stigma and encouraging resilience.

KidsMatter, a mental health initiative for primary schools, highlights the importance of mental health education being offered from childhood through to adolescence, stating:

Mental health and wellbeing is vital for learning and life. Children who are mentally healthy learn better, benefit from life experiences and have stronger relationships with family members, school staff and peers. Good mental health in childhood also provides a solid foundation for managing the transition to adolescence and adulthood, engaging successfully in education and making a meaningful contribution to society.

Whilst we are aware that there are currently a number of programs and initiatives being administered by schools, there is currently no consistent approach to ensure that all Tasmanian students are receiving equal access to these, or that the programs being offered are evidence based, best practice initiatives. It is important that all Tasmanians have access to evidence based, age appropriate, mental health education in each year of schooling from primary through to secondary school. By ensuring access to these programs, young people will be provided with the tools to be socially and emotionally strong, through promotion, prevention and early intervention.

Data source:

Tasmanian Department of Education

Percentage of target population who self-rate feeling “happy” to “very happy” in reference to their life as a whole

Why is this important?

It is important not just to record and monitor the young people who are in need of support, but also to monitor the number of young people who do identify with feeling happy. A report by the Australian Scholarship Group on Student Social and Emotional Health states:

"Children and young people with a positive state of social and emotional health are more likely to successfully meet the physical, intellectual and social changes required through childhood and adolescence."

A strong level of happiness contributes to good mental health, which contributes to a greater sense of wellbeing. It has been consistently demonstrated that young people who have positive emotional wellbeing, are more likely to also have positive physical and social wellbeing. Furthermore, when this indicator is considered alongside other indicators which are monitoring mental ill-health, and through consistently tracking age-based cohorts, progress can be tracked to see increases and/or decreases in the mental well-being of Tasmanian young people, whilst also providing a tool to both identify young people who may be at risk, identify successful initiatives, and provide scope for understanding longitudinal studies.

Data source:

Mission Australia Annual Youth Survey Report

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/746-youth-survey-2017-report/file>

Percentage of Tasmanian children and young people accessing care under a mental health care plan, both new and continuing

Why is this important?

Mental health care plans are an essential tool in providing individuals with access to mental health care in a timely and accessible way. A mental health care plan, available from a GP, can outline what type of care the person needs, what their goals are, and refers the individual to appropriate services. For many young people, a mental health care plan is key in providing early access to supports and preventing their mental health needs from reaching an acute level. Research has shown that 75% of mental health concerns occur before the age of 25. As such, it is crucial for young people to have access to timely early intervention supports in this significant developmental stage. In a partnership with Mission Australia and the Black Dog Institute, the Youth Mental Health Report was developed using Mission Australia's Youth Surveys from 2012-16. This report has highlighted the importance of early intervention for young people, stating:

While adolescence can be a particularly challenging time for young people, it is importantly also a period in which there is great potential to provide prevention and early intervention services and supports to improve mental health and wellbeing. By intervening early, improving knowledge around mental health and encouraging help-seeking behaviour, it may be possible to not only circumvent the short term detrimental effects of mental health disorders, but also to safeguard young people from longer term, ongoing cycles of dysfunction and disadvantage that may result when mental health disorders remain untreated into adulthood.

By tracking and monitoring the number of young people who are in need of these supports through a mental health care plan, government will be able to not only ensure that appropriate supports are in place for young people at their time of need, but also that there are appropriate future supports available too. Comparing figures year by year will also determine if the state is seeing a growth or drop in demand. By focusing on the mental health of young people, individual, social and economic benefits are clear. Not only will an understanding of the mental health needs of young people ensure that these needs are being met and supported, this understanding will also allow progress towards achieving an overall state of wellbeing for Tasmania's young people now and in the future.

Data source

Medicare Item Reports

Number of children and young people accessing in-school supports for mental health concerns

Why is this important?

Ensuring that children and young people are supported through their entire education is vital in providing all young Tasmanians with the tools they need to succeed. As outlined by *MindMatters*, a mental health initiative for secondary schools that aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people:

It is likely that young people experiencing mental health difficulties will find the school environment particularly demanding and may struggle to actively engage with school work, concentrate on tasks, tolerate uncertainty or demands, engage with social networks and cope with the various day to day demands of study.

Due to the impact that mental health difficulties can have on young people throughout their education, it is vital that all Tasmanian children and young people have access to in-school mental health supports. Additionally, not only is it important that all young people have access to these supports, it is also important that the numbers of young people within Tasmania who are accessing these supports, and the potential onwards referral pathways via schools, are monitored and reported on. Furthermore, schools provide the opportunity to capture data across a number of variables including different age groups and locations. Many young people who do experience mental health difficulties are at risk of disengaging from school and education, which can further impact their mental health, and also be detrimental to their health overall.

Data source:

Tasmanian Department of Education

Rates of children and young people accessing community based mental health supports, and rates of young people returning for further care

Why is this important?

It has been acknowledged in both state and national mental health plans the importance of community based support. On this, Tasmania's Rethink Strategy states:

Community support is an important part of contemporary mental health service delivery, providing support for consumers to live successfully in the community, enabling consumers to maintain contact with family and friends, improving recovery, and supporting families and carers in their caring roles.

For young people in particular, community support is incredibly important in ensuring positive mental health outcomes. This is best achieved through early intervention supports in the form of services which are approachable and specialise in providing these supports specifically to young people. Through ensuring that these support services are easily accessible, young people gain the ability to access supports in a way which minimises isolation and is individualised to their needs. Many individuals self-refer into these services, allowing young people to be empowered to easily access the right care, at the right time.

In a UNSW study titled "*Is Headspace Making a Difference to Young People's Lives?*" The positive outcomes of community based supports for young people are clear, including an increase in mental health literacy, an decrease in K10 scores, and improved social and occupational functioning. These results clearly show the importance of community based mental health services and represent the success of these models in improving both the mental health, and overall health, of young people. Furthermore, by monitoring the number of young people using these supports, and the way in which young people engage with these services (eg. through self referral into individual supports, participating in community engagement activities, etc) a greater understanding of the positive impact these services have will be achieved, allowing for targeted resource allocation in the direction of programs which are having successful outcomes.

Data source

State and federally funded community mental health organisations, DHS – Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Directorate and Primary Health Tasmania

Rates of children and young people admitted to hospital with mental health concerns, and readmission rates

Why is this important?

Through gaining an understanding of how many young people are presenting to hospitals for mental health concerns, and being readmitted after a previous stay, an accurate picture of the level of demand and scope for early intervention can be established. We understand that there has been an increase in the numbers of young people seeking mental health support from hospitals, which suggests more needs to be done earlier to ensure that hospitals are not seen as the only entry point for people needing care. Through gathering information on how many young people are presenting at hospital as their first point of call, we can begin to develop an insight into how we can be providing these earlier interventions and supports.

This insight can inform the direction for a wide variety of stakeholders including GPs, schools, families and communities to ensure that there are appropriate supports and education initiatives available to prevent young people's mental health reaching an acute level. This insight will also allow for targeted resource allocation, including assessing and actioning what is required to provide a stepped model of care for young people within Tasmania. The Australian Government's Department of Health defines a stepped model of care as:

An evidence-based, staged system comprising a hierarchy of interventions, from the least to the most intensive, matched to the individual's needs. Within a stepped care approach, an individual will be supported to transition up to higher intensity services or transition down to lower intensity services as their needs change.

Tasmania's Rethink states "strengthening mental health services for infants, children and young people and their families and carers" as a key action, with this priority acknowledging that "experiences in early childhood and adolescence can determine mental health outcomes later in life." Through ensuring that resource allocation is targeted based on identification of risk and need, effective preventative intervention can be offered preventing more young people from requiring acute level, hospital based care. This will ensure greater recovery and deliver stronger long-term outcomes, contributing to greater overall wellbeing.

Data source

THS data