



4 June 2020

Media Release

Impact on Tasmanians due to social isolation will be felt long after restrictions lift

Despite restrictions easing and people starting to emerge from their homes, it seems the long term impact on the mental health of Tasmanians could be felt for many more months to come. The Mental Health Council of Tasmania is learning that social isolation is having a significant effect on Tasmanians who have a history of mental illness as well as people who were otherwise mentally healthy before the pandemic.

Through consultation with and data collection from mental health service providers it is clear that more robust and long-term strategies need to be the focus to prevent more people from becoming increasingly unwell.

MHCT CEO, Connie Digolis, says that as each stage of restrictions are lifted there needs to be consideration on how this will impact particular population groups within the community in regard to their mental health and wellbeing.

“Over the past few months we have heard how difficult it has been for many people to remain at home and change the way they previously went about their day-to-day life. It’s been a necessary sacrifice we have all had to make, however, for many Tasmanians it is having a detrimental effect on their mental health. At some level everyone has been living in a heightened state of anxiety and stress. In saying that, we cannot presume that there will be no lasting effects felt as result of the isolation as restrictions lift. This is true for a lot of young people in high school who are now looking to return to a very different style of classroom learning next week. We need to pay close attention to the most vulnerable of young people, those with a pre-existing mental health condition, and guide them through this transition into the next phase.”

The youth mental health services at Life Without Barriers, are seeing many young people and their families experience some concerning effects as a result of social isolation.

Nicky Osborne, Program Manager for Mental Health Services at Life Without Barriers, has shared with MHCT that, “Many of the young people we support already experience social anxiety, for some young people this has significantly increased during this time and has resulted in negative impacts such as increased gaming and screen addiction, problems with sleep and physical health as well as family conflict. The feelings of being socially disconnected has a detrimental impact on so many young people. Time with peers is an extremely important part of their development,” said Ms Osborne.

There needs to be an acknowledgment that just because young people are returning to school next week it does not mean that those experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns will see their symptoms automatically dissipate. Instead, Ms Osborne says that some young people who were finding it difficult to adapt to the at-home learning environment are now feeling increasingly stressed and under pressure about returning to the classroom.

MHCT is asking Governments to continue to focus on the mental health and wellbeing of people now and further into the recovery process post the pandemic. The rebuilding process isn’t just about infrastructure and the economy - it is also about rebuilding healthy and safe communities for everyone.

“Young people, over the coming weeks, need supports in place to allow for a difficult time of adjustment and rebuilding resilience and coping strategies. Now, more than ever, we would encourage all Tasmanians to take stock of what supports they can reach out to, and to value our mental health and wellbeing as we move forward,” said Ms Digolis.

-Ends-

Available for interview – Connie Digolis

Media Enquiries: 0405 672 004

COVID-19 Helpline – A Tasmanian Lifeline 1800 98 44 34



Please also include the following crisis support services for any story regarding mental health or suicide.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au , Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
beyondblue: 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

More information on safely reporting on mental illness or suicide can be found at

<https://mindframe.org.au/> and <https://www.tascharter.org/>

Background Information

[The Mental Health Council of Tasmania \(MHCT\)](#)

MHCT is a member based peak body representing the Community Managed Mental Health services in Tasmania. MHCT's role is to provide leadership by advocating for continuous improvement across all facets of mental health and suicide prevention. MHCT is a collective, representative voice working toward ensure future sustainability of the sector and the community. MHCT works to promote the reduction of stigma and champion mental health awareness and the value of good mental health.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic MHCT are working with their members the Community Manager Mental Health Services, representatives from State Government departments and agencies as well as the broader community sector to get a clear picture of how the restrictions would directly impact Tasmanian's mental health and wellbeing. Through extensive consultation and data collection we are seeing the effect the pandemic is having on Tasmanians with an existing mental health condition as well as those who are experiencing some level of psychological distress, anxiety or depression for the first time.

Key findings of our recent consultations:

- The impact of isolation was a **much more frequent** reason for people to access mental health supports as a new referral than previously;
- Anxiety, drug/alcohol use, relationship problems and family violence were all **more frequent** reasons for people to access services as a new referral than previously;
- Depression, dealing with anger, loss or grief, the impact of unemployment, and suicidal ideation and suicide were all **slightly more frequent** reasons for people to access services as a new referral than previously
- Most services that have noted an increase in demand say this is from existing clients requiring more support. (70 per cent)

[Life Without Barriers](#)

Life Without Barriers is a charitable organisation supporting close to 23,000 people living in over 400 communities across the nation. In Tasmania, their mental health services include two youth specific programs:

- #iConnect which provides non-clinical therapeutic and psychosocial supports and case management for young people aged between 12-18 state-wide.
- Synergy provides clinical support (i.e. psychological therapy) and case management to young people aged 18-24 in Southern Tasmania.

For more information about these programs please contact Life Without Barriers on 6232 8750