

Media Release

Community Managed Mental Health Services finding it difficult to 'get back to normal'

For Community Managed Mental Health services, the ability to provide Tasmanians with a return to face-to-face therapies and group sessions is of paramount importance. However, even with the easing of restrictions the need to maintain the four-square metre rule, among other physical distancing rules, means most organisations will not resume all services as per pre-COVID19 any time in the near future.

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) is calling for all levels of Government to listen to these concerns raised by the community managed mental health sector and look for safe solutions to alleviate this issue.

MHCT CEO, Connie Digolis, says that we need to be reassuring Tasmanians that help will be there when they need it. "We want our services to be able to concentrate on working with Tasmanians who need access to mental health supports. We are hearing that services are providing telehealth services where necessary and appropriate, however, this is sometimes not what many people may choose as their preferred option, or what may be best for their health over the longer term."

"Service providers are doing their best to adhere to the Government's public health guidelines, however due to a lack of resources, staffing concerns and suitability of some their physical office spaces we aren't seeing many organisations being able to return to delivering the full range of services in the way they once were. Without a long-term plan detailing how we can accommodate not only the restrictions but the increasing demand, we may see people's mental health deteriorate", said Ms Digolis.

Wellways Tasmania Regional Manager, Dianne Hawkrige, says that while restrictions are designed to keep us safe and physically healthy, for many people it means they are unable to access the services they need to stay mentally healthy. "We have started to resume some of our face-to-face services in person but there are also a number of our other services that can't practically be resumed while physical distancing restrictions remain. The health and safety of our staff and participants remains our top priority so we will continue to monitor and follow Government health advice, but we must also ensure that people who rely on services that can't currently resume can access the support they need. We will continue to consider innovative responses to meet the needs to ensure this occurs where at all possible."

Robert Waterman, CEO of Rural Health Tasmania, says his staff and clients are finding it particularly challenging and is considering looking at renting additional properties in some regions that may be more suitable to accommodate the needs of our services. "It's been a challenging process for organisations and our teams to start the transition back into the offices, considering all the different services we provide. We received a lot of support and guidance on how to adapt our services and staff to work from home so that process was relatively simple. Now we are receiving conflicting advice from various agencies that we need to adhere to social distancing measures but resume services to what they were prior to the pandemic."

"What's needed now is some flexibility and progressive thinking about how we can future-proof our services allowing for individual needs of each organisation and type of service. The expectations need to shift toward how we can prepare the whole community for other potential crises we may face in the future. We need one clear voice on how to not only get back to some sense of normalcy but some understanding that this is going to look different for quite some time yet," said Mr Waterman

-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)

[Rural Health Tasmania](#)

Rural Health Tasmania is a health and well-being organisation that offers a wide range of free health services across the North West and West of Tasmania. They provide mental health counselling via phone and face to face for at risk patients. They also provide Mental Health Nurses for people with severe and complex mental illness. These services are provided across the entire North West, West Coast, Central Coast and King Island.

[Wellways](#)

Wellways Australia Limited is a leading not-for-profit mental health and disability support organisation with services in Tasmania Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria Their services span mental health, disability and community care, and reach thousands of people each year.