



**Mental
Health
Council**
OF TASMANIA

www.mhct.org

Resubmission 2020-2021 Budget Priority Submission

Mental Health Council of Tasmania

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Contents

About Us.....	3
Executive Summary	3
MHCT Revised Budget Priorities 2020-2021	4
Part 1: Context since MHCT’s original BPS 2020-2021	4
Part 2: MHCT Revised Budget Priorities for Immediate Action	6
Part 3: Initiatives for consideration at a later stage.....	10

About Us

The [Mental Health Council of Tasmania](#) (MHCT) is the peak body for community managed mental health services in Tasmania. We represent and promote the interests of our members and work closely with Tasmanian Government agencies and Primary Health Tasmania to ensure sectoral input into public policies and programs. We have a strong commitment to enabling better mental health care access and outcomes for every Tasmanian. Our purpose is to improve mental health for all Tasmanians, and our vision is for all Tasmanians to have awareness of, and value, their mental health and wellbeing.

Executive Summary

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a revised Budget Priority Statement (BPS) for the financial year 2020-2021, which will take into consideration the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our state, and the community managed mental health sector (CMMHS).

Following COVID-19 restrictions and physical distancing measures put in place from mid-March 2020, MHCT developed a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Strategy in order to clearly understand the impacts on the Tasmanian mental health sector, consumers and their families and friends. The Strategy incorporates extensive and ongoing consultation with a large number of mental health providers operating in the Tasmanian mental health system. This extensive consultation process has provided MHCT with a clear understanding of how the pandemic is impacting the sector, and the ability to track the mental health impacts on the Tasmanian population more broadly. MHCT has also been able to share these insights regularly with government and agencies, to assist with pandemic and recovery planning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered unprecedented impacts on the mental health sector and the Tasmanian population. As COVID-19 restrictions were implemented state-wide, the mental health sector quickly responded to these new measures, and rapidly adapted their services to ensure their clients continued to receive mental health supports and services. Since the pandemic began, service providers have mitigated and managed their pandemic response, often with little extra resourcing to support the extra workload required.

In light of the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, MHCT has prepared a revised Budget Priority Submission that details priority initiatives from [MHCT's original BPS 2020-21](#) whilst also considering the report and recommendations outlined in the [Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council Interim Report \(July 2020\)](#).

MHCT Revised Budget Priorities 2020-2021

Now, more than ever, the mental health and wellbeing of all Tasmanians must be addressed and supported. In our [submission to the Premier's' Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council \(PESRAC\)](#), MHCT recommended a promotion, prevention and early intervention approach be undertaken to support all Tasmanians to know when, how and where to get help if they need it, before becoming acutely unwell. MHCT welcomes the PESRAC interim report that adopts this approach within its recommendations to address the mental health of Tasmanians. Additionally, MHCT believes there is a clear correlation with several initiatives highlighted in our original BPS to directly address the impacts of COVID-19 on the sector and the mental health of young people.

Priorities for Immediate Action

- 1. Undertake scoping for recommendation 61 of the PESRAC interim report**
- 2. Action the Tasmanian Peer Workforce Development Strategy**
- 3. Implement a schools-based mental health peer support program**

Part 1: Context since MHCT's original BPS 2020-2021

Since MHCT's original BPS 2020-2021 (lodged in December 2019), several factors have either been addressed, are still ongoing, or have highlighted further priorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Mental Health Week 2020**
MHCT acknowledges the State Government's support and funding for the continuation of the annual Mental Health Week Small Grants program. By supporting this work, MHCT will be able to provide Small Grants to communities to promote mental health and wellbeing during Tasmania's annual Mental Health Week, this year scheduled for 5 - 10 October 2020.
- **Community Managed Mental Health Services Funding**
Since the last Tasmanian Budget announcement, MHCT has welcomed the Premier's announcement (in March 2020) to support stability and workforce retention through the return of service contracts for state funded community mental health services to three years, instead of one-year contracts. However, due to the delayed 2020/2021 budget, MHCT understands there are several community managed mental health services still awaiting surety in regard to their funding. MHCT encourages the government to carefully consider the provision of funding to these services as a priority, not just for the final months of the 2020/21 budget but over the longer term.

MHCT recommends that now more than ever, all community managed mental health service providers need assurance of ongoing funding to continue their work, retain their workforce and to plan in advance with confidence.

- Review of the Mental Health Services Helpline and Crisis Assessment and Treatment Teams (CATT)

Whilst acknowledging that COVID-19 may have had an impact on the progress of the review of the Mental Health Services Helpline and Crisis Assessment and Treatment Teams (CATT), MHCT was expecting a public release of the State Government's recommendations arising from the review process. While the Tasmanian community is still awaiting information on the outcome of these reviews, there remains significant structural and cultural barriers within the existing services which are impeding how Tasmanians access the right mental health service at the right time. MHCT believes the [Centralised Mental Health Access Service](#) model outlined in our Submission to State Government in relation to the review will address many of these concerns and barriers to early access.

MHCT recommends that the State Government Department of Health provide a public update on the status of the Mental Health Services Helpline and Crisis Assessment and Treatment Teams (CATT) review, along with an outline on impending changes and improvements to these services. This information will provide an opportunity to understand how impending changes will be incorporated into other reform programs along with impacts on the CMMH sector.

- Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC)

MHCT acknowledges the recent Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council Interim Report, and planning for further community consultation. MHCT welcomes the recommendations, in particular recommendations 50, 54, 57, 58, 60 and 61. MHCT looks forward to providing a further response to the interim report as requested by the Advisory Council, however, MHCT believes that work to address whole-of-population mental health should be actioned immediately so as to support as many Tasmanians as possible to seek help for their mental health early before becoming acutely unwell.

MHCT recommends that work on recommendation 61 should be actioned as soon as possible to support the mental health of all Tasmanians.

Part 2: MHCT Revised Budget Priorities for Immediate Action

1. Undertake scoping for recommendation 61 of the PESRAC interim report

MHCT welcomes recommendation 61 within the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) interim report, which places value on a screening tool to address the myriad mental health impacts of COVID-19 on Tasmanian communities.

A screening tool will support and encourage Tasmanians to 'check in' on their mental health and on their loved ones, supporting people to get help early before becoming acutely unwell. Investment in these types of approaches can also provide economic benefits. The [Productivity Commission's Draft Report into Mental Health](#) (October 2019), highlights that the direct economic cost of mental ill-health and suicide in Australia is estimated at \$140 million a day. By implementing mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention approaches, we can reduce the number of people requiring higher intensity mental health supports which are often associated with higher mental healthcare costs.

This type of screening/assessment tool would be a first for Australia and would strongly support the development of mental health literacy across our state. MHCT would support the implementation of the recommendation through an initial environmental scoping phase and development of a proposed implementation strategy.

PESRAC Interim Report: Recommendation 61

'The State Government should develop and provide Tasmanian with a 'whole of population screening tool' so the general public can 'check in' on their mental health and seek help early if needed. This should be supported by a public awareness campaign to prevent long-term impacts and raise awareness of the newly-funded access points for help'

Phase 1: December 2020 - June 2021

- *Develop a strategy for the development and implementation of a mental health screening tool and associated engagement plan* - Partner with UTAS, Department of Health and Primary Health Tasmania along with other stakeholders to scope and plan for an appropriate mental health screening tool and associated help-seeking pathways. Develop an engagement plan with detailed costings for the implementation of the screening tool in a localised, whole-of-population context taking into consideration current initiatives that may be used as a platform to engage the Tasmanian community in the utilisation of the screening tool.

Phase 2: June 2021 – June 2022

- *Action the implementation and engagement strategy* – Develop the screening tool and action the engagement plan in partnership with UTAS, Department of Health and Primary Health Tasmania and other key community stakeholders to support the take up of the tool in a variety of localised settings with particular focus on vulnerable cohorts.

Phase 3: July 2022 – June 2023

- *Testing, evaluation and sustainability planning* – Evaluate the effectiveness of the screening tool in addressing whole-of-population mental health, along with the capacity of the tool to be utilised by vulnerable cohorts and measure help-seeking behaviour within the community. Utilise the evaluation to develop a long-term implementation plan.

Costs

Phase 1 - \$140,000

Including 1 FTE Project Officer and UTAS Services

Phase 2 and 3 - TBC

Costs to be detailed within the implementation strategy developed in phase 1

2. Action the Tasmanian Peer Workforce Development Strategy

Indications are that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated impacts will drive increased demand for low-intensity mental health services over the coming months, if not years. It is crucial that the CMMH sector is well prepared and equipped to address this increase in demand for mental health supports and services. Mental Health Peer Workers will play an integral role in bolstering the sector to meet anticipated demand, and in providing lived experience, knowledge and recovery focused expertise.

Additionally, the growth and expansion of the mental health peer workforce is progressing with the development and planning of [Mental Health Integration Hubs](#), where peer workers will have integral roles, along with initiatives to support more people in accessing the NDIS scheme.

To prepare for a peer workforce, the State Government funded the development of the [Tasmanian Peer Workforce Strategy](#), released in November 2019. MHCT recommends that the State Government should match the Federal Government's funding (via Primary Health Tasmania) to implement the Strategy and its Action Plan, through the role of Peer Work Coordinator. By funding the implementation of the Strategy, the Tasmanian mental health sector will continue to progress the evolution of a quality peer workforce ready to meet the low-intensity mental health support needs of Tasmanian communities.

Phase 1: July 2020 – December 2020

- *Develop a Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination Plan* – Stakeholders including representatives from current workforce initiatives such as the Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program (including the Mental Health Integration Hubs) are identified along with CMMH service providers, training providers and potential peer workers via Flourish to develop a coordinated plan that engages and supports the sector in preparing and growing a Peer Workforce.

Phase 2: January 2021 - December 2021

- *Implement Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination Plan* – Work with Stakeholders to action the plan, including the coordination of work experience opportunities with the CMMH sector and continuing to support organisations in preparing for a Peer Workforce through the development of role descriptions, training and community of practice opportunities.

Phase 3: January 2022 - June 2022

- *Review and sustainability planning* – Review the implementation of the Peer Workforce Development Strategy and undertake longer term planning to understand the growth and ongoing needs of a Peer Workforce including identified strategies to support the sustainability of a Peer Workforce in Tasmania and opportunities to further expand a Peer Workforce into other community service sectors.

Costs

\$130,000 over 18 months (Please note, Federal Government via Primary Health Tasmania have already confirmed a commitment to partially fund the Peer Workforce Coordinator role with the provision of \$130,000 over 18 months. MHCT requests the Tasmanian Government match these funds).

Phase 1 - Funded by Primary Health Tasmania

Including 0.6 FTE Peer Workforce Coordinator

Phase 2 - Jointly funded by the Tasmanian Government and Primary Health Tasmania

Including 1 FTE Peer Workforce Coordinator

Phase 3 - Funded by the Tasmanian Government

Including 0.6 FTE Peer Workforce Coordinator

3. Implement a Schools-Based Mental Health Peer Support Program

The pandemic has caused significant disruption and created uncertainty for children and young people since restrictions began in March 2020. Now, more than ever, the State Government should consider the implementation of a schools-based Mental Health Peer Support Program.

Our young people, particularly school leavers, are facing challenging times that require skills to cope with change, build resilience and support their friends and themselves. Mental health training should be implemented immediately for all young people in years 10, 11 and 12 along with the development of a long-term peer support program for all Tasmanian schools.

While MHCT recognises the breadth of work currently being undertaken to support young people's mental health and wellbeing in schools at both the State and Federal level, it is equally important to recognise the value of peer to peer models in effectively supporting young people. [A recent report by the Office of the Advocate for Young People](#) focuses on the experiences of children and young people in disaster and recovery, and the report highlights the need for peer to peer support programs to enable young people to support each other during and after disaster events. A schools-based Mental Health Peer Support Program will equip our young people with the skills and tools they need to support themselves and each other.

The following priority is an evolution from [MHCT's original BPS 2020-21](#), taking into account the impacts of COVID-19 on young people's mental health. MHCT suggests that a small pilot trial is not sufficient, and that all school leavers should be provided with the skills to support their peers, friends and their own mental health. By supporting this priority, the State Government will be providing young people with a strong basis to both understand and actively address their mental health now, and in the years to come.

Phase 1: December 2020 – February 2021

- *Scoping for appropriate youth mental health training is undertaken* - Work with key stakeholders including BeYou and the Tasmanian Department of Education to identify appropriate mental health training and planning for the implementation of training to year 10, 11 and 12 students during 2021 and 2022
- *Develop framework for the implementation of a pilot schools-based Peer Support Program* – develop guidelines and associated supports for schools to participate in the pilot program which would include recruiting young people to become Mental Health Student Peer Leaders who are trained to provide self-help supports to their peers.

Phase 2: March 2021 – June 2022

- *Year 11 and 12 students undertake mental health training* – Work with DoE to deliver mental health training to all year 11 and 12 students in Tasmanian Government funded schools during 2021.
- *Trial and evaluation of a Schools-Based Peer Support Program* – a select number of schools are recruited to participate in a trial of the Schools-Based Peer Support Program where interested students are invited and supported to become Mental Health Student Peer Leaders within their schools.

Phase 3: July 2022 - December 2022

- *Develop framework to implement a Schools-Based Peer Support Program across all schools* – A review of delivered mental health training and evaluated trial of the School-based Peer Support Program is undertaken. Suitable mental health training is identified

along with detailed scoping and planning for implementation of a Schools-Based Peer Support Program across all Tasmanian Government Schools.

Costs

\$300,000 over two years (excluding MHFA training and school participation costs)

Part 3: Initiatives for consideration at a later stage

MHCT notes that the below requests appeared in our [original 2020/2021 BPS](#). MHCT will undertake a review of these priorities and consider re-inclusion of the below initiatives in our 2021/2022 Budget Priority Submission.

- *The Tasmanian Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Communications Charter (TMHSPCC)*
- *A State-based Suicide Prevention Quality and Improvement Program*
- *Mental Health Week Awards Program and year-round Stigma Reduction Activities*