

28 April 2022

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Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) Active Ageing Consultation

MHCT welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the H.E.A.R Active Ageing Community Consultation.

Good mental health and wellbeing is an important factor in healthy ageing and an expressed priority amongst older Tasmanians.¹ Despite this, and the fact that almost 20% of Tasmanians are aged over 65 years, there is currently no tailored mental health response for older Tasmanians.

MHCT advocates for inclusion of mental health and wellbeing as a priority action area in the 2023-2029 Active Ageing Plan.

Ensuring access to clinical and non-clinical mental health services, social connection and physical activity can all help to support older people's mental health.² While the prevalence of mental health disorders tends to decrease with age, certain sub-groups of the older population are at higher risk, including people in hospital, people living in supported accommodation (including residential care), people with dementia and older carers.³ Age discrimination or 'ageism' can also negatively impact upon older peoples' mental health. It can stop people from engaging in and contributing to the community, reducing mental and physical health and leading to increased morbidity and mortality.⁴

Social isolation and exclusion are more commonly experienced by older people than the general population and this can have a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing.⁵ Older people have been disproportionately impacted by COVID when it comes to mental health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to compounded social isolation.⁶

In 2020, MHCT conducted consultations to identify the current and emerging impacts on older Tasmanians and the service system that supports them. The report - [COVID-19: A mental health response for Older Tasmanians](#) – provides the consultation findings, along with a series of opportunities to support better mental health and wellbeing outcomes for older Tasmanians.⁷ One of the most common experiences that impacted on the wellbeing of older Tasmanians was social isolation, which was compounded for older Tasmanians under COVID-19 restrictions. Social isolation was especially prevalent for older people living in communities with significantly reduced social engagement and those in residential care due to many facilities being in protracted lockdown conditions.

As evidenced by the report, addressing older person's mental health requires a co-designed mental health strategy for older Tasmanians that takes a promotion, prevention and early intervention approach, with particular focus on building individual and community capacity, along with ensuring access to appropriate services to meet the needs of older people experiencing mental health difficulties. Informed by the report findings, MHCT would like to highlight the following priorities and opportunities to support the mental health and wellbeing of older Tasmanians:

- Specific co-designed mental health responses are needed for certain cohorts of older aged Tasmanians, including CALD, LGBTQI+ and Tasmanian Aboriginal older people.
- Investment in digital literacy programs should continue and attention should be given to strategies that target older aged people, particularly in geographically isolated areas. This is particularly important given the increased use of telehealth.
- A multidisciplinary, integrated approach to mental health service provision is needed for older Tasmanians. It is particularly important to ensure integration between the aged care and mental health sectors, as well as improved integration between state managed mental health services and community managed mental health services.
- Person-centred care and support is required for older people experiencing mental ill-health. This involves developing respectful and collaborative partnerships with older people, being responsive to their needs and preferences, supporting them to make decisions that uphold their wellbeing, enabling clear communication and involving family members and carers where appropriate.^{8,9}
- Location-specific social prescribing should be promoted to general practitioners as an appropriate intervention for older people experiencing mental health difficulties. There is also a need to upskill the community to enable them to reduce the risk of social isolation by recognising risk factors and supporting older people who experience them.¹⁰
- A central information or access point which contains details on what mental health services exist (by location), service criteria, current capacity/estimated wait times and a clear referral pathway would assist older Tasmanians to access appropriate services. The development of the Tasmanian Lifeline into a centralised referral access point will assist with this.
- Peer support via older aged Tasmanians with a lived experience of mental illness could help others who might be experiencing troubling symptoms for the first time to navigate mental health difficulties. Older aged Tasmanians should be provided with opportunities to engage in peer support programs such as mental health lived experience speaker training or peer work training.
- Mental health stigma and discrimination reduction strategies should include a focus on reducing ageism and the stigma of mental illness in older adults. This requires addressing the intersecting factors of ageism, racism and sexism, as well as the determinants of poor mental health, including social isolation.

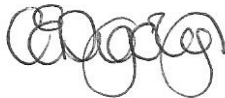
In developing the 2023-2029 Active Ageing Plan, MHCT would also like to emphasise the importance of ensuring that it recognises and responds to existing strategies in Tasmania that include a focus on mental health and wellbeing. This includes the [Rethink 2020 Implementation Plan](#) and the [Healthy Tasmania Five-Year Strategic Plan 2022–2026](#). Appropriate governance and reporting mechanisms should be in place to ensure integration and collaboration and to avoid duplication.

For example, MHCT's upcoming mental health literacy program will include a mental health education campaign designed to improve the mental health literacy of Tasmanians. This will provide an opportunity to support champions to model and promote good mental health and wellbeing in their communities, including older persons. Resources and materials will be co-designed, tailored and delivered through regional coordinators and peer training programs. Ensuring this work is recognised within the Active Ageing Plan and that MHCT's reporting is utilised to contribute to Plan outcomes will be important.

Overall, MHCT would like to applaud the strong co-design approach that COTA is taking to the development of the new Active Ageing Plan and we look forward to continuing to work closely with key stakeholders in the next stages of its development and implementation.

For further discussion on any elements of this response, please contact MHCT.

Yours sincerely,



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CEO
Mental Health Council of Tasmania

References:

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- ¹ Communities Tasmania (2017) *Strong, liveable communities, Tasmania's Active Ageing Plan 2017-2022*, available: https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/16938/Strong_Liveable_Communities_-_Low_Res.pdf
- ² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Older Australians at a glance: Mental health*, accessed 30 November 2021, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/health/health-selected-conditions#Mental%20health>
- ³ *ibid*
- ⁴ Council of the Ageing Tasmania (2019) *Embracing the future – Tasmania's Ageing Profile, Part II*, available: <https://www.cotatas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/10/Embracing-the-Future-Part-II-Full-Report.pdf>
- ⁵ *Australia's health 2020 data insights (aihw.gov.au)*
- ⁶ Mental Health Council of Tasmania (2021) COVID-19: A mental health response for Older Tasmanians, available: <https://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/COVID-19-A-mental-health-response-for-Older-Tasmanians-May-2021.pdf>
- ⁷ *ibid*
- ⁸ Department of Health & Human Services (2011) *What is person-centred health care? A literature review*, available: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/researchandreports/What-is-person-centred-health-care-A-literature-review>
- ⁹ *ibid*
- ⁹ Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2011) *Patient-centred Care - Improving quality and safety through partnerships with patients and consumers*, available: <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/patient-centred-care-improving-quality-and-safety-through-partnerships-patients-and-consumers>
- ¹⁰ Council of the Ageing Tasmania (2019) *Embracing the future – Tasmania's Ageing Profile, Part II*, available: <https://www.cotatas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/10/Embracing-the-Future-Part-II-Full-Report.pdf>