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**Mental  
Health  
Council**  
OF TASMANIA



# Mental Health Council of Tasmania Budget Priority Submission

2026-2027

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## About us

The [Mental Health Council of Tasmania](https://www.mhct.org) (MHCT) is the peak body representing the mental health and wellbeing needs of all Tasmanians, and the community organisations that work with and support them. We work closely with government to amplify the voices of our members and Tasmanian communities, to provide input into public policies and programs. We advocate for reform and improvement within the Tasmanian mental health system. Our purpose is to strengthen and advocate for our communities and service providers to support the mental health and wellbeing of all Tasmanians, and our vision is that every Tasmanian has access to the resources and support needed for good mental health and wellbeing.

## Acknowledgements

MHCT acknowledges the Palawa people of Lutruwita as the traditional and original owners, and continuing custodians of this land and pays respect to Elders past and present.

We acknowledge individual and collective contributions of those with a lived and living experience of mental ill-health and suicide, and those who love, have loved and care for them. Each person's journey is unique and a valued contribution to Tasmania's commitment to mental wellbeing, suicide prevention, alcohol and other drugs harm reduction, and systems reform.

## SUMMARY OF BUDGET PRIORITIES

### 1. Strengthen community-managed mental health services

*To meet unmet psychosocial need and prevent upstream distress from becoming downstream crisis.*

- **Introduce five-year, indexed funding agreements** for all existing and new community mental health services, with six-monthly renewal periods to ensure accountability, continuity, and workforce stability. Longer-term funding arrangements are internationally recognised as best practice for community service sustainability and retention of skilled staff.
- **Provide a 25% uplift to community-managed mental health services to meet unmet psychosocial need and prevent avoidable crises.**  
A modest, targeted uplift ensures people can access timely support in their own communities -particularly in regional centres where early intervention capacity and psychosocial supports are currently thin.

**Budget:** 25% uplift to FY2025 base.

**Alignment:** Rethink 2020 - 2025; State Suicide Prevention Strategy; Tasmanian 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy.

### 2. Grow Tasmania's Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce

*Critical support for an essential component of modern mental health care.*

Peer workers are especially valuable in regional electorates, where clinical capacity is limited and community connection is crucial.

**Budget:** \$400K p.a. to June 2030.

**Alignment:** National Mental Health Workforce Strategy; Rethink 2020–2025.

### 3. Build workforce capability

*Essential training and support for the community workforce across the state.*

This ensures small and regional services have the skilled workers they need to respond early, confidently, and safely.

**Budget:** \$180K p.a. to June 2028.

**Alignment:** Rethink 2020 - 2025; National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement; Tasmanian 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy.

### 4. Secure MHCT's core functions

*Streamlined, efficient funding that consolidates multiple grants and strengthens system leadership.*

Long-term funding improves coordination across the system, reduces administrative overhead, and ensures consistent advice to government—particularly important as the next State Mental Health Plan is developed

**Budget:** \$1,011,000 p.a. for five years.

**Alignment:** Rethink 2020 - 2025; Tasmanian 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy; National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

## 5. Expand the popular Take a minute campaign

*A practical, everyday wellbeing program with strong uptake across regional workplaces.*

Expansion includes a statewide “Take a minute Tuesday” initiative and dedicated partnerships with small businesses and local councils in electorates across the state.

**Budget:** \$250K p.a. to June 2028.

**Alignment:** Tasmanian 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy; Workplace Mental Health Framework, Rethink 2020-2025.

## 6. Prioritise mental health prevention

*A ring-fenced investment stream to stabilise families, build resilience, and reduce hospital demand.*

Prevention investment stabilises communities, reduces demand on acute care, and protects essential early supports during tight fiscal periods.

**Budget:** Allocate 5% of the mental health budget to prevention by 2030.

**Alignment:** Tasmanian 20-Year Preventative Health Strategy; Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Strategy.

### Why these investments deliver Value for Money

These priorities offer some of the strongest economic returns available in the mental health portfolio:

- Early intervention and accessible psychosocial support prevent hospitalisations.
- Community supports reduce police and emergency responses.
- Peer workers reduce relapse and support stable recovery.
- Prevention strategies lower long-term system demand.
- Consolidated funding reduces administrative inefficiency and duplication
- A stable, resourced mental health peak is foundational to developing and implementing sector strategies, and building the workforce required for the next National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreements (NMHSPA).

Each recommendation strengthens local capacity, supports Tasmanian wellbeing, and ensures the State Budget is protected from escalating downstream costs.

### What are psychosocial supports?

Psychosocial supports are a non-clinical, recovery-oriented intervention that assist people with mental illness to participate in their community, manage daily tasks, undertake work or study, find housing, get involved in activities, and make and maintain connections with family and friends.

Psychosocial supports are usually delivered by community managed mental health organisations. They are tailored to the person and their needs and are often complimented by clinical supports.



## Executive Summary

*“Having access to the mental health and wellbeing support you need, close to where you live, is so important.”*

**Premier Jeremy Rockliff**, Media Release, March 2024

Tasmania stands at a critical juncture in its mental health reform journey. The state continues to face some of the highest rates of mental illness, psychosocial disability, and suicide in Australia, with demand for services persistently outpacing supply. **Over 90,000 Tasmanians currently live with a mental health-related condition, while a further 125,000 are at risk of developing one** (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). More recent estimates indicate that nearly one in five adults (19.8%), approximately 88,700 people, experienced a mental health condition within the past 12 months (Primary Health Tasmania, 2025).

Despite this growing need, a substantial proportion of Tasmanians are not receiving the support required. **It is estimated that nearly 75% of people with moderate to severe mental health conditions are missing out on essential community-based psychosocial support services** (HPA, 2024). These figures highlight enduring structural and systemic gaps in mental health service delivery particularly in regional and rural areas. Contributing factors include limited service availability, workforce shortages, and barriers to accessing early intervention and ongoing support.

**The Tasmanian Suicide Register reported 693 deaths by suicide between 2012 and 2020**, underscoring the ongoing mental health crisis and the urgent need for coordinated prevention strategies (Department of Health Tasmania, 2025). The state’s suicide rate remains consistently higher than the national average (Primary Health Tasmania, 2025), reflecting persistent inequities in access to care and the pressing need for integrated, community-driven approaches to mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, Tasmania records the highest rate of psychosocial disability in Australia (8.3%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), further illustrating the depth of the challenge.

While there has been commendable progress under the Bilateral Agreement on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention which has supported adult walk-in clinics, perinatal mental health programs, and Tasmanian Eating Disorder Service, community-based psychosocial supports, the backbone of recovery and early intervention, remain underfunded, inconsistently commissioned, and often short-term (Productivity Commission, 2025). This is despite “*shifting the focus from hospital-based care to support in the community*” being a key reform direction in the Rethink 2020 strategy. Ongoing instability undermines workforce retention, continuity of care, and long-term planning, leaving **more than ten thousand Tasmanians without access to the essential support they need to manage their conditions, maintain housing, pursue education or employment, and participate fully in community life.**

## An Evolving Mental Health Landscape

Tasmania's mental health system is being tested by multiple, intersecting pressures. Nationally, one in five adults experiences a mental disorder each year, with rates particularly high among young people (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). Locally, these patterns manifest as growing demand across primary, community, and specialist services. Meanwhile, the state's justice and custodial systems are under increasing strain. Incarceration rates have risen sharply, and evidence shows high rates of untreated mental illness among prison entrants. Parliamentary inquiries and custodial health reviews highlight significant gaps in prison mental health provision, posing both individual and systemic risks (Tasmanian Parliament, 2024).

At the same time, Tasmania's private inpatient mental health sector faces instability, with closures and financial stress threatening bed capacity and driving greater reliance on stretched public services (Tasmanian Department of Health, 2025). Without a coordinated community response, this trend risks exacerbating pressure on already stretched acute care and emergency departments.

**These challenges underscore the urgent need to reinvest in prevention, community capacity, and community-based interventions that reduce crisis presentations and hospital demand.** Community-based, recovery-oriented care, combined with a skilled, secure workforce, offers the most effective and cost-efficient pathway to a resilient, person-centred mental health system.

### Funding certainty is desperately needed in the community-managed mental health sector

Five-year funding contracts will improve staff retention and enable the sector to invest with confidence. This will allow community-managed organisations to increase capacity and deliver more psychosocial supports to Tasmanian families *with the same money*.

**Six-month contract renewal periods** will provide security to organisations and the ability to transition clients or operationally adapt should funding conditions change.

Adequate indexation is desperately needed in long term funding arrangements to provide a reasonable answer to cost inflation for community-managed services.

## The Case for Strategic Investment

*“...we are seeking to build a contemporary integrated model of mental health care so that people can get more holistic support... Part of that is refocusing mental health services from mostly hospital-based settings to now deliver supports that reach out to Tasmanians in the communities where they live.”*

**Bridget Archer, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Budget Estimates, 19 November 2025

A robust, community-based system is not only more humane, but also fiscally responsible. Evidence demonstrates that prevention, early intervention and psychosocial support significantly reduce relapse, re-admission, and long-term service dependency (Black Dog Institute, 2023). **Every dollar invested in mental health prevention and early intervention can return up to \$4 in broader economic and social benefits** (Productivity Commission Report, 2020).

Community-managed mental health and psychosocial recovery services are not just compassionate investments; they are economically rational ones. When a state budget is looking for levers that deliver both human and fiscal returns, this part of the system consistently proves its worth.

Community-managed mental health services act as a stabilising force in Tasmania’s broader social and economic landscape. They aren’t a drain on the budget. They are one of the few sectors that function explicitly to *prevent* downstream costs. A well-designed and resourced psychosocial support system interrupts the slide into crisis, diverting people away from Emergency Departments, police intervention, and high-cost acute beds.

That is the value of prevention through community managed mental health: **a modest investment upstream avoids heavy expenditure downstream.**

This is the "avoided cost" effect, and community-managed services generate it every day. In practice, each dollar placed into prevention and early intervention returns multiple dollars in savings across health, justice, emergency services, and even child protection; the avoided cost being the \$1800 per day or more of admitted in-patient care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025).

Our member organisations already operate with an efficiency culture due to limited funding, and this has forced them to innovate, stretch resources, and deliver supports well beyond funded capacity. It’s hard to imagine a better value-for-money outcome for the public purse.

**A budget that strengthens community-managed mental health and psychosocial recovery services is a budget that lowers future expenditure, improves population wellbeing, and builds a more stable, productive Tasmania.** It is one of the most sensible and fiscally responsible investments the state can make, especially in a period where every dollar must stretch further.

*“Tasmanians want a future where we plan for wellness, not just respond to illness”*

**Bridget Archer, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Media Release, 17 November 2025



## Strategic Role of MHCT

MHCT, as the peak body representing the community managed mental health sector, plays a broader strategic role in driving system-wide improvement. **MHCT not only leads initiatives that build wellbeing and community capacity, but also plays a central role in coordinating reform, supporting workforce development, and elevating the expertise and voice of lived experience of Tasmanians into service delivery.** Through initiatives like *Take a minute* and the Lived Experience Training Hub (LEx Training Hub), MHCT translates research, evidence and national strategies such as the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, into practical, meaningful outcomes within the Tasmanian mental health system.

As a peak, MHCT gathers lived experience and frontline service provider insights and translates them into credible advice for government, lifts the capability of the community managed sector, and enables collaboration across Tasmania's entire mental health sector. It is MHCT's role to promote the value and opportunity of prevention and psychosocial supports, help governments navigate the trade-offs between crisis response and long-term investment, and provide independent accountability across reform cycles. In an environment dominated by clinical services and acute demand, MHCT works to ensure the system stays coherent, community-centred, and focused on keeping people well, not just responding when they're acutely unwell.

However, MHCT's capacity is constrained by limited and project-based funding. Expanding its core operational funding would enable a more coordinated, evidence-informed, and strategically aligned response to Tasmania's mental health needs. Sustained investment will ensure continuity of critical functions including reform coordination, workforce development, and peer workforce leadership.



## Take a minute.

Take a minute is a whole-of-population mental wellbeing campaign developed by the Mental Health Council of Tasmania in partnership with Be Well Co. (affiliated with the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute).

It flips the script on mental health by focusing on what is strong, rather than what is wrong. This strengths-based approach empowers people to take proactive steps for their mental wellbeing, improves mental health literacy, and reduces stigma - key factors in prevention.

By embedding prevention at a population level, *Take a minute* helps Tasmanians live happier, healthier, and more productive lives, while reducing long-term costs to the health system and the economy.

**"Taking a minute to pause and reflect on our self-care practices has been transformative for our whole team. Amidst the chaos of daily routines, it's common to overlook personal wellbeing."**

- Trista Abbott,  
New Mornings



## Key Strategies and Actions

### 1. Strengthen the Community Mental Health Sector to Address Unmet Need

Tasmanians continue to experience high levels of psychological distress, long wait times, and limited access to psychosocial support, particularly in rural and regional areas. Strengthening the community-managed mental health sector is essential to meeting rising demand and preventing escalation to more acute and costly services.

*Recommended actions:*

- **Introduce five-year, indexed funding agreements** for all existing and new community mental health services, with six-monthly review periods to ensure accountability, continuity, and workforce stability. Longer-term funding arrangements are internationally recognised as best practice for community service sustainability and retention of skilled staff (Bond et al, 2014; Duncan et al, 2023)
- **Provide a 25% uplift to community-managed mental health services to meet unmet psychosocial need and prevent avoidable crises.** This will support service planning, immediate capacity uplift, and long-term sustainability to meet rising demand and unmet psychosocial needs, ensuring community-managed services are adequately resourced to deliver early intervention, recovery-focused supports, and step-down alternatives to clinical care. This investment is critical to building capacity in preparation for the forthcoming NMHSPA. Early investment will ensure that Tasmania's community-managed workforce can expand service capacity, adopt national reforms, and meet future expectations.

### 2. Grow Tasmania's Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce

**Provide long-term investment to secure and grow Tasmania's peer workforce through the Lived Experience Training Hub (LEx Training Hub), \$400,000 p.a. to June 2030**

The Lived Experience workforce is an essential pillar of a contemporary mental health system. Tasmania's Lived Experience Training Hub (LEx Hub) provides high-quality training, supervision, and professional pathways that align with emerging national workforce expectations.

*Recommended actions:*

- **Provide an additional three-year funding commitment for the Lived Experience Training Hub,** extending its operations beyond the current 2027 funding horizon. This ensures sustainability, continuity of impact, and alignment with national lived experience workforce development priorities.

- **Embed structured external supervision, mentoring, and career pathways** to support retention, safeguard workforce wellbeing, and build a skilled and stable peer workforce across community-managed and government services.

Expanding the Lived Experience Workforce is one of the key actions of Rethink and the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy. The LEx Training Hub plays a critical role in the provision of professional development for Lived Experience workers, training pathways to the TasTAFE Cert IV in Peer Work and tailored assistance to organisations to meet their Lived Experience Workforce needs.

*“The Mental Health Council's lived experience training hub I mentioned is an important part of that, providing those training pathways for people with lived experience across mental health, suicide, and drug and alcohol prevention.”*

**Bridget Archer, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing**  
Budget Estimates, 19 November 2025

### 3. Build Workforce Capability

*Recommended action:*

- **Invest \$180,000 per year for two years to build sector capability.** Invest in workforce capability-building, including professional skill development, supervision, cross-sector networking, and training in evidence-based psychosocial and community wellbeing approaches. This would include the recruitment of a training and networking coordinator and subsidised training across the community managed sector.

This funding will support the MHCT to employ a full-time Sector Capacity Building Coordinator, who will work with both the community-managed and public mental health services to provide training at highly subsidised rates along with networking opportunities.

This approach will improve and develop clinical and non-clinical skills, leadership and management capabilities, evaluation knowledge and capabilities, and compliance whilst providing opportunities to create individual connection and networking. This will not only support a more skilled and capable mental health sector. It will support individual professional connections that are fundamental to effective service integration.

This role could also seek to improve sector knowledge based on the priorities identified in the new Rethink & Beyond Mental Health Strategy, such as capabilities to support priority populations, and building knowledge and capacity to support individuals experiencing co-occurring alcohol, tobacco and other drugs concerns or comorbid health conditions.

This project will include the delivery of online, face-to-face training and will be delivered across Tasmania and its regions.

#### 4. Secure MHCT's core functions for Coordinated Reform

As the peak body for community managed mental health in Tasmania, MHCT is ideally positioned to coordinate system reform, strengthen workforce development, and elevate lived experience leadership across the sector. However, like its members, MHCT requires confident, certain, long-term sustained funding.

*Recommended action:*

- **Provide \$1,011,000 p.a. in a single, five-year grant to secure MHCT's core functions, consolidate existing funding streams, and add a part-time policy officer to strengthen reform capacity.**

Consolidate MHCT's core funding base to provide stable, long-term leadership in statewide mental health reform. Increased investment will enable MHCT to build its policy and reform capacity to support Rethink and Beyond, the 20-Year Tasmanian Preventive Health Strategy, the Workplace Mental Health Framework, Older Persons Mental Health reforms, the Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Strategy, proposed changes to commissioning, the development of an outcomes framework, inform national strategic activities and agreements, work with lived experience organisations, and many other activities associated with national and state strategies and reforms.

The funding will roll current core funding, sector reform, workforce, and Tasmanian Mental Health Week coordination into a single recurrent funding stream, reducing reporting and administrative costs whilst providing certainty. A small additional uplift will secure a part time Policy Officer role to meet the increased demand for policy development, data analysis, and sector insights, ensuring MHCT can fulfil its key role and provide ongoing, comprehensive and highly consulted advice to government.

A well-resourced MHCT strengthens Tasmania's capacity to respond to community needs, drive system coherence and integration, and promotes positive mental health at population scale.

#### 5. Expand the popular *Take a minute* campaign

**Continue and expand the *Take a minute* campaign, including dedicated staffing to partner with businesses and communities and deliver a statewide *Take a minute Tuesday* wellbeing initiative.**

*Take a minute* is transforming the way Tasmanians think about mental health and wellbeing. Grounded in the latest wellbeing research, it represents the future of mental health campaigns - shifting from a traditional reactive approach that looks for signs something is wrong, to a proactive, prevention-focused approach that helps people maintain and even boost their mental wellbeing.

**The campaign encourages Tasmanians to focus on what is strong, not what is wrong.** This strengths-based approach improves mental health literacy, reduces stigma, and empowers individuals and communities to take ownership of their wellbeing.

The *Take a minute* app, launched in May 2025, is the next evolution of the campaign. It offers a fun, engaging way for Tasmanians to learn what nurtures mental wellbeing and, critically, encourages participation with friends, family, colleagues, and teammates - building connection and community while promoting mental health.

Planning for *Take a minute* Tuesday in 2026 is already underway. With funding, this statewide awareness day will see workplaces, schools, and community groups pause to focus on mental wellbeing together.

To capitalise on the growing success of *Take a minute*, continued investment is essential. With additional funding, we can engage tens of thousands more Tasmanians through workplaces and communities. Without it, the momentum we've built will be lost, along with the opportunity to empower Tasmanians with the tools and knowledge they need to take ownership of their mental health and wellbeing.

*Recommended action:*

- **Provide \$250K p.a. to June 2028 for the Take a minute campaign** to build on its proven success and expand its reach. This investment will enable the rollout of a statewide "*Take a minute Tuesday*" initiative and establish dedicated partnerships with small businesses and local councils in electorates across Tasmania. Continued funding ensures momentum, maximises community engagement, and embeds prevention-focused mental wellbeing strategies at scale.

This funding will support the co-design and construction of the campaign materials and tools, the project staff to recruit businesses, individuals and community groups, internal evaluation, and funding to promote both the campaign, activities and events associated with the *Take a minute* Tuesday campaign day.



**Take a minute.**  
*Tuesday*

***Take a minute Tuesday*** is a statewide awareness day where workplaces, schools, community groups, and individuals pause to focus on mental wellbeing.

It expands upon the successful *Take a minute* campaign, focussing on what is strong, not what is wrong.

It's about leaning into the good things that we have in our lives - the people, places and activities that give us a boost and make us feel good. It promotes proactive habits that help us build a better understanding of our own wellbeing, to prevent mental health challenges before they arise.

## 6. Prioritise Mental Health Prevention

### *Recommended action:*

- **Allocate at least 5% of the mental health budget to prevention by 2030**, aligned with the upcoming 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy. This should be a protected, ring-fenced investment with a clear governance structure involving community-managed and public sector partners to drive measurable prevention outcomes.

A stronger and protected investment in prevention is necessary because the current system remains overwhelmingly oriented toward crisis response, despite clear evidence that early action reduces demand on emergency departments, specialist services, and the justice system. The Productivity Commissions' recent review showed participants consistently emphasised that upstream prevention and early intervention are far more cost-effective than downstream acute responses, and should therefore be prioritised in future agreements. The review cites evidence such as workplace mental health programs generating a 4:1 return on investment, illustrating the economic case for prevention beyond its wellbeing benefits. A ring-fenced and accountable prevention budget would ensure these savings are realised rather than continually displaced by crisis expenditure (Productivity Commission, 2025).

The Productivity Commission Review also highlights that addressing mental health outcomes requires whole-of-government action on social determinants, including housing security, employment, education, justice involvement, and social connection. Prevention cannot be achieved solely within clinical portfolios. A protected prevention allocation, coupled with clear governance that includes community-managed organisations, creates the structural capacity for agencies to coordinate long-term, upstream interventions that target these determinants. The Productivity Commission Review explicitly notes the need for governments to accept that investment in one portfolio produces savings in others, reinforcing the case for a cross-portfolio prevention budget that is visible, protected, and jointly governed (Productivity Commission, 2025)

**“...the current system is under-resourced in community settings, and overly reliant on high-cost specialist care, an approach that is financially unsustainable and inconsistent with long-term population wellbeing goals” (MHCT, 2025)**

According to the Productivity Commission, prevention and early-intervention initiatives directly reduce the number of people reaching crisis points, thereby reducing pressure on emergency departments and acute beds, which is a major system stress point. A dedicated prevention budget would enable state and community-managed organisations to expand local, low-intensity, non-clinical supports that keep people well, reduce relapse, promote recovery, and provide alternatives to hospital-based care, aligning fully with the Treasurer's intent to bring the state budget into a balanced, fiscally sustainable condition.



## Concluding statement from the CEO

Tasmania deserves a mental health system that reduces suffering, strengthens communities, and uses public resources wisely. The community-managed mental health sector is central to achieving that vision. Far from being a cost to government, our work actively protects the State Budget by preventing crises that would otherwise flow into emergency departments, police responses, the courts, and acute health services. Every day, our sector quietly saves the State money by keeping people well, connected, and supported long before they reach breaking point.

Our services have been doing this work with limited and often uncertain funding, yet we continue to deliver above our resourcing. The efficiencies, innovations, and partnerships we have built now form the backbone of a system that works to reduce long-term demand across multiple government portfolios. When government invests in community-based mental health supports, it is not just an investment in people's wellbeing; it is a strategic decision that reduces future costs and strengthens the social and economic fabric of the State.

As we move forward, MHCT and our sector stand ready to partner with the Tasmanian Government to co-design the next phase of reform. We bring evidence, lived experience, and a frontline understanding and expertise from our members and partners. With the right long-term investment and a shared commitment to prevention and psychosocial supports and recovery, Tasmania can build a mental health system that is sustainable, coherent, and genuinely people centred.



Dan Vautin  
MHCT CEO

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