

26 May 2014

Dr Panayiotis Tyllis
Chief Psychiatrist
Director Mental Health Policy
Office of the Chief Psychiatrist
SA Health
Via email: OCP@health.sa.gov.au

Dear Dr Tyllis

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES, YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Health Consumers Alliance (HCA) is the peak body for health consumers in South Australia. As an independent alliance of health consumers and health consumer organisations, we work together with our members to achieve our vision of consumers at the heart of health care. A strong and effective voice for the promotion and protection of health consumer wellbeing and rights, HCA promotes health equity and provides systemic advocacy to inform, shape and sustain consumer centred care.

Youth Mental Health Services in South Australia

The South Australian Youth Mental Health System of Care Framework has the aim to:

...develop an integrated mental health system of care across the age (16 to 24years) and developmental continuum which is youth friendly, accessible and supported by strong collaborative partnerships in order to achieve optimal health, wellbeing and quality of life for young South Australians.

The purpose of Youth Mental Health Services is that every contact strengthens a young person's wellbeing, mental fitness and engagement with life. To bring this purpose to life and underpin the system of care, draft Operational Guidelines been proposed to support a consistent state-wide approach for implementing services. The proposed Operational Guidelines are intended to assist in developing strong and effective partnerships between the specialist mental health services, other key services and young people, their family, friends and other supports.

As recognised in the Framework and Guidelines mental health is fundamental to wellbeing, physical health and quality of life. For children and young people, mental health is vitally important at all developmental stages as it will impact on a person's wellbeing later in life. The experience of mental illness or poor mental health can have a significant impact on young people who are still developing socially, emotionally and physically. In particular, it can significantly impact on their social development, relationships with family and others, educational and employment outcomes.

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Generally the decade of youth is a time of general good health and wellbeing for a large proportion of the population, but it is also a critical time in the emergence of mental health problems. Mental illness has been described as the chronic disease of young people with 75% of mental illness occurring for the first time before the age of 25 years.

Youth Centred, Accessible, Safe Service and Consumer Engagement

It is essential for the health of young people for South Australia to have a Youth Mental Health Service that is youth centred, accessible, and safe and successfully engages with young people, their families and carers and other key stakeholders in the lives of young people. Such a system may well prevent the development of and reduce acuity of mental illness and associated morbidity and mortality, as well as reduce significant costs to families, the community and the health system.

To ensure relevance, access and appropriateness of the service to young people, a culture of consumer and community engagement should be established at the commencement of the service. Prioritising the engagement of young people, their families and carers as a continuous improvement process will assist in meeting the National Mental Health Standards, support a youth-centred focus, assist in making the service accessible and facilitate appropriateness of care.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Embedding a focus on prevention and early intervention (in partnership with schools, non-government organisations and other stakeholders) will reduce lifelong morbidity and mortality for young people experiencing the onset of a mental illness, reduce long-term social and health care costs and contribute to a recovery focus for the service.

Learning and Development

Appropriate development and delivery of Youth Mental Health Services will need to be supported by the recruitment of skilled staff and the provision of learning and development for existing staff. The Ernst and Young Review has recently noted that learning and development does not need to be developed from scratch and there may be savings to be achieved by utilising existing programs from other jurisdictions.

Culture, Communication and Accountability

Many of the issues in the delivery of mental health services in South Australia can be categorised as ones of culture, communication and accountability. The Ernst and Young Review of the of the Stepped System of Mental Health Care and Capacity to Respond to Emergency Department Demand and the SA Coroner's Findings have identified a number of issues of culture, communication and accountability in mental health services, many of which bear reflection on in the development of the new Youth Mental Health Service.



HCA strongly encourages SA Health and the Local Health Networks to consider the importance of leading change and investing in the necessary processes to achieve the benefits a new Youth Mental Health Service should deliver to young people, their families, carers and the community. Once the system is established, Local Health Networks should be held accountable for the delivery of appropriate health outcomes in youth mental health.

We look forward to seeing the development and implementation of the new Youth Mental Health Services in South Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Cousins'.

Michael Cousins
Manager, Policy and Advocacy

