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Sarah Lovell MLC
Tasmanian Labor Party
Opposition Rooms
Parliament House
Hobart TAS 7000

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Dear Sarah,

Mental Health Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in response to Labors' discussion paper on mental health on behalf of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) and our members.

YNOT applauds Labors commitment to strengthening crucial services for Tasmanians experiencing mental ill health, particularly services for children and adolescents. For the purpose of this submission YNOT's response will focus on section 7 in the discussion paper 'Youth' and will identify barriers and solutions to achieving better health outcomes for young Tasmanians.

About YNOT

YNOT is a member based peak body representing the interests of young people aged 12-25 years, and the Tasmanian youth sector. We are a not for profit organisation that advocates for, and works collaboratively with Tasmanian young people, the youth sector, and all levels of government to ensure that the voices of our stakeholders are heard. YNOT represents 85,000 young people, 60 YNOT member organisations and approximately 300 youth sector workers, through our regional networks, statewide.

Our mission is to work with young people, the Tasmanian youth sector, the community and all levels of government to increase the participation and contribution of young people in the State.

Introduction

Young people in Tasmania face challenges that are vastly different to previous generations and mental health is no exception. Alarmingly, Tasmania has the second highest youth suicide rate per capita in Australia and suicide is now the leading cause of death in young Tasmanians aged 12-25¹. Whilst suicide rates indicate the number of deaths attributed to mental ill health, it does not accurately represent how mentally healthy young people are in Tasmania.

¹ Department of Health and Human Services (2016). Youth Suicide Prevention Plan for Tasmania (2016-2020).

Members of the 2018 Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) on Health and Wellbeing identified mental health as the leading health concern for young Tasmanians encompassing anxiety, depression, stress, and feeling overwhelmed and pressured. Similarly, YNOT state-wide consultations with over 120 young people in 2019 identified mental health as the leading health concern. Furthermore, findings from the 2018 Mission Australia Youth Survey identified mental health as the top issue for both female and male respondents from Tasmania. The survey found that 43% of young people identified mental health as the top issue facing them today². This is up from 33% in 2017 and has doubled since 2016.

Young people are resilient; however, there are many individual, organisational and structural barriers impeding on positive mental health outcomes for young Tasmanians. Young people have unique and specific needs with regard to the provision of mental health support based on critical periods of adolescent development. During state-wide consultations with young people and the Tasmanian youth sector during 2018-19, significant barriers were identified in relation to the provision of youth mental health services in Tasmania.

Service accessibility and availability

Young people reported an awareness of limited support options available however identified access to appropriate services as a significant issue³. This was largely attributed to the lack of services available, particularly in rural and remote areas, lengthy wait times, lack of transport options and the location of services. It is important to young people that a range of services are available including face to face, online and outreach and are fully accessible at different points and times.

It is not uncommon for young people to present at hospitals in Tasmania seeking mental health support both during, and after, business hours. The lack of youth mental health services available in the community, across the continuum from early intervention and prevention through to tertiary support services, means that hospital is often the first point of contact for young people. Existing mental health services in Tasmania are frequently at capacity. This is further compounded by the lack of bulk billing General Practitioners (GP's) available in the community and the cost associated with seeking treatment from GP's. The introduction of My Health Record and the ability for parents/carers to access information in relation to Medicare subsidised treatment poses confidentiality and privacy concerns for young people and clinicians.

Hospital should not be the first point of contact for young people seeking mental health support however young people and their carers often have no alternative. This places further pressure on an already under resourced service system and often results in young people leaving hospital without receiving treatment and support due to extensive delays. Furthermore, the absence of an adolescent inpatient mental health ward in the city of Hobart is a major gap in the youth mental health service system.

During our consultations, Youth sector workers reinforced the sentiments of young people with regard to barriers and also identified a lack of integrated care pathways for young people seeking treatment or support as a significant issue. The majority of community mental health services are working at capacity and are reporting an increase in the number of young people presenting with complex mental health concerns. This poses significant workforce challenges as staff are often ill equipped to respond to their needs citing a lack of skills, experience and expertise. The lack of

² Mission Australia (2018), Youth Survey Report 2018.

³ Youth Network of Tasmania (2018) Tasmanian Youth Forum Health and Wellbeing.

integrated care pathways and referral options available in the community often results in staff engaging emergency services for assistance and support. Responding to the needs of young people presenting to services with complex mental health concerns is incredibly resource intensive and often impacts on the delivery of other programs and services within an organisation.

The Tasmanian Government has committed to reducing the suicide rate of young people in line with the national average^{4,5}; however we are failing to reach multiple targets around accessibility and establishment of services⁶.

In light of this, YNOT believes that we need to better understand the gaps in the youth mental health service system to inform wise investment. This could be achieved through a Tasmanian Youth Mental Health Service System Mapping Project that focuses on issues and gaps specific to the youth mental health sector. YNOT understands that Primary Health Tasmania (PHT) intends to embark on a similar mapping exercise for the mental health service system in Tasmania however; we understand that it is unlikely to specifically target the youth mental health service sector.

Research demonstrates that up to 75 per cent of major mental illnesses are presented before 25 years of age⁷, suggesting greater investment in prevention and early intervention, and initiatives specifically tailored to young people will reduce the demand for costly tertiary services and save lives. Given that major mental ill health manifests during adolescence in three out of four adults, it is imperative that young people receive care when and how they need it.

The Tasmanian Governments 'Rethink Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan' recognises the importance of strengthening mental health services for infants, children and young people. It also recognises the importance of receiving timely and appropriate support to prevent mental ill health, however greater investment is required to achieve reform in this area.

Education

Young Tasmanians have also reported stigma, fear, judgement, stereotypes and negative past experiences as barriers for seeking mental health support. This includes other people judging them, peer pressure, lack of confidence, fear to speak up, wanting to fit in, embarrassment, finding it hard to take the first step, pride and hesitation getting in the way, and not feeling comfortable.

Young people particularly want more information about, and a reduction in, the fear and stigma surrounding mental ill health and wellbeing. Tasmanian schools play a key role in providing this information. One of the challenges for Tasmanian schools implementing youth focused mental health and wellbeing education and awareness is the numerous programs available to them. For example, Beyond Blue has just released "Be You", a national education initiative that adds to the mix.

YNOT believes there is an urgent need for the Department of Education to have oversight of mental health information delivered in schools to ensure consistent and evidence-based mental health and wellness information is available to students. There are currently no guidelines or standards to support school-based decision making about which mental health program best meets their needs.

⁴ Tasmanian Liberals (2018). Building Your Future.

⁵ Department of Health and Human Services Tasmania (2015). Rethink Mental Health - A long term plan 2015-2025.

⁶ National Mental Health Commission (2018). Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, 2018: Progress Report.

⁷ McGorry PD and Mei C (2018). Early intervention in youth mental health: progress and future directions. Evidence Based Mental Health .

To address this situation, oversight of program selection and delivery needs to be implemented. This should include a list of compliant programs from which schools can select to meet their needs, and the development of agreed benchmarks that clearly define what program content needs to cover. These benchmarks would include prevention and early intervention, factors contributing to anxiety and depression, and other key defined indicators and issues of mental health.

YNOT understands the Department of Education intends to release their 2019 Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan specifically targeting resilience, emotional wellbeing, depression and anxiety in young people. This welcome Plan recognises the challenges facing young people in schools and should be imbedded within schools and communities as a holistic approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing.

Teachers also face challenges in delivering mental health and wellbeing education and awareness. In addition to professional learning packages, teachers require their own training and support to improve confidence in the delivery of mental health education to students. YNOT believes that teacher training is necessary and will achieve the best returns on investment in youth mental health education and awareness.

Young people report that they want to be better informed about positive mental health and have greater control over their own mental health and wellbeing. 2018 TYF participants identified the need for more mental health information and events to be included into the school curriculum to provide them with the tools to identify the signs and symptoms of mental ill health amongst themselves and their peers. Solutions proposed by young people to increase knowledge and reduce stigma surrounding mental health included:

- Increasing mental health events into the school year, such as visits from **headspace**
- Imbedding mental health first aid training into the school curriculum
- Adopting a whole-school approach for mental health wellbeing
- Peer led interactive sessions and open discussion sessions
- Better training of teachers to respond to mental ill health in the classroom
- School referrals to mental health services
- Positive advertising of mental health services in the community and promotion of mental wellbeing

Final Comments

A multi-sectoral approach is needed to create a coordinated response for improving mental health outcomes in young people. Young people experiencing adversity is a known factor for contributing to mental ill health.⁸ Young Tasmanians have the second highest youth unemployment rate⁹ in the nation, the second lowest secondary school retention rate¹⁰ and record low housing affordability and availability¹¹. Young people are currently disproportionately represented in the state's homeless population¹². Other challenges our young people face include geographic isolation and limited transport options; particularly in regional and remote areas.

⁸ World Health Organisation (2013). Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020.

⁹ Department of Health and Human Services Tasmania (2018), Youth at Risk Strategy

¹⁰ ACARA (2016), Apparent retention rates for students, Year 10-Year 12, <<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/apparent-retention#View1>>, Accessed 15/11/2018

¹¹ Social Action and Research Centre Anglicare Tasmania (2018), Rental Affordability Snapshot 2018 Tasmania

¹² Shelter TAS (2018), Fact Sheet – Homelessness in Tasmania 2018

Safe, secure, affordable and appropriate housing is a basic human need that directly impacts on the health and overall wellbeing of our community. Young people need a stable home environment, access to materials and transport to support their participation, active engagement in training or employment and have access to appropriate health care services¹³. By ensuring these domains are met, Tasmanian young people can build resilience in their own mental wellbeing and independence.

Young people report that they are frustrated when voicing their issues and concerns regarding mental health support, access and education. They want to be more involved in their mental health education and want to see a holistic approach to supporting mental wellbeing, mindfulness, and self-help. It is imperative that greater investment is made in youth mental health and wellbeing, particularly the provision of early intervention and prevention initiatives, to achieve positive outcomes for young Tasmanians. Tasmanian youth mental health services cannot meet the current demand for treatment and support and this is likely to be further exacerbated by future population growth and increasing pressures facing young Tasmanians.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on an incredibly important matter impacting on the lives of young Tasmanians. YNOT welcomes the opportunity to participate in roundtable discussions on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Tania Hunt
Chief Executive Officer

¹³ Department of Health and Human Services (2018). Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework.