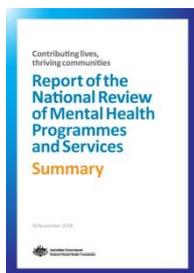


'Contributing lives, thriving communities'

The National Mental Health Commission Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services

During 2014, the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) conducted a review of national mental health programmes and services on behalf of the Commonwealth Government. The focus of the review was on assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes and services in supporting individuals experiencing mental ill-health, their families and other support people to lead a contributing life and engage productively in the community. This included programmes and services which have as a main objective:

- The prevention, early detection and treatment of mental illness
- The prevention of suicide
- Mental health research, workforce development and training, and/or
- The reduction of the burden of disease caused by mental illness.



The 'Report of the National Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services' was presented to the Commonwealth Government in December 2014 and made publicly available in April 2015. This report can be accessed [here](#).

The review found "fundamental structural shortcomings" in mental health care and services throughout the country. On the basis of making changes within existing resources the report provides 25 recommendations including over 200 actions across nine strategic directions to guide implementation over the next decade, and create a system to support the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. We now await a response from government to the review and this may occur in the form of a fifth national mental health plan.

The NMHC report states that the combined Commonwealth, state, and territory funding for mental health care amounts to an estimated \$13.52 billion. "Despite almost \$10 billion in Commonwealth spending on mental health every year, there are no agreed or consistent national measures of whether this is leading to effective outcomes or whether people's lives are being improved as a result," the review stated.

The Commission's report highlights the systemic failure of current arrangements, noting:

- "Poor planning, coordination and operation between the Commonwealth and states and territories, resulting in duplication, overlap and gaps in services."
- "Vulnerable people left to navigate a complex and fragmented system."

A central theme underpinning the recommendations is a move to a model of person-centred care, where the system is designed to fit around the needs of people, not around what service providers have to offer, with funding aligned to outcomes rather than activity. It also proposes a regional approach to improve equity of access to services, and to engage and empower communities in identifying priorities and developing local solutions.

The focus of the review is on action taken across the health and mental health sectors to achieve better planned and coordinated services, clearly defined roles and targets, early diagnosis and preventative care and this will assist in reducing the incidence of mental health problems. Less consideration is given to changes required in the employment, housing, justice or education systems to meet the needs of mental health consumers and

carers. Similarly, there is little detail on how the current mental health sector might be integrated with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) over time.

The review comes at a time when there is much change occurring in the mental health environment as a consequence of government reforms such as the NDIS and the introduction of the new Primary Health Networks. The review also compliments the directions, recommendations and actions of the NSW Mental Health Commission Strategic Plan 2014 – 2024 and NSW Health ‘Strengthening Mental Health Care in NSW’ plans.

The NMHC stresses that now is the time for action on the part of Government, and that action needs to be strongly supported by all service delivery sectors.

What does this mean for NGOs¹?

- The NMHC proposes that there should be a significant increase in the proportion of funding to the NGO sector, to strengthen the sector's ability to provide wrap-around services which keep people out of hospital, out of crisis, and support people to lead contributing lives in the community.
- It proposes that current and additional funding should be available for a fewer number of larger organisations, or consortia of organisations, to provide more comprehensive, whole-of-person services.
- It recommends moving away from separate, siloed payment arrangements to a focus on early intervention and prevention. In particular, integrated care pathways for those most in need will enable a smoother journey across the mental health system, regardless of who funds and provides services—resulting in better access to needed services, improved outcomes and more effective and efficient use of resources.
- The NMHC supports “bundling-up” programmes, so that the role and capacity of NGOs and other service providers to deliver more comprehensive, integrated and higher level mental health services and support for people, their families and supporters is boosted.
- As capacity and competence is built, NGOs should look at developing greater capacity to move into broader provision of clinical (i.e., treatment) support services, in addition to the current suite of non-clinical (i.e., psychosocial disability and recovery support) services.
- Expansion of the role and service offering of NGOs to further deliver a range of services such as step-up/step-down care, rehabilitation, and community based treatment.
- The NMHC also recommends reporting against meaningful, measurable performance targets at national, state, and regional levels, with the achievement of targets tied to ongoing funding.

¹ The term NGO is intentionally used here to denote both not-for-profit community managed organisations (CMOs) and private, for-profit non-government entities.