

Media statement

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More support needed for postnatal depression

More and better targeted support is needed to help expectant and new mothers battling depression, Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck said today.

Releasing consultation results for the Commission's *Perinatal Infant Mental Health Service Enhancement Discussion Paper*, the Commissioner said feedback indicated the importance of community-based assistance.

"The consultation showed the focus needs to be on enhancement of community-based supports, as well as clinical services.

"Survey respondents identified sustainable support for the non-government sector as a game-changing strategy," Dr van Schoubroeck said.

"The clear message is that more assistance is needed, but it must be well-targeted to get meaningful help to mothers, fathers and infants with mental health issues.

"The consistent view is that greater access to community-based support would help prevent the development of postnatal depression, reduce the severity and duration of such problems, and aid referrals to specialist treatment services when needed," the Commissioner said.

"While many Queenslanders use the information developed by *beyondblue*, respondents identified a number of additional opportunities for earlier intervention, including integration of mental health promotion and illness prevention activities in antenatal classes."

Dr van Schoubroeck said respondents pointed to a bottleneck that occurs when mental health problems are detected, but specialist treatment services are not available in a timely manner.

"Again the focus is on maintaining family and community networks in-situ, and avoiding hospitalisation where possible. This is particularly important for families in rural and remote Queensland," Dr van Schoubroeck said.

"That's not to say we don't need more mental health hospital beds in Queensland for mothers with their babies, but that we need to ensure a spectrum of supports and treatment options."

Dr van Schoubroeck said respondents singled-out a lack of appropriate services and strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

"This includes problems such as cultural diversity in the clinical workforce and the lack of bi-lingual interpreters and multi-lingual resources."

The Commissioner said the survey results and the Commission's discussion paper would help inform the Department of Health's Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug Services Plan.

The Commission will promote the importance of incorporating mental health in general antenatal education, and reaffirm the importance of perinatal and infant mental health as an element of a broader promotion and early intervention programs.

"Certainly the consultation results reinforce the need for a greater focus on perinatal health, and for better responses to the mental health needs of expectant and new mothers and their families," Dr van Schoubroeck said.

What is perinatal illness? It is both depression and anxiety experienced to a clinically significant level during pregnancy and post-birth, by both mothers and fathers.

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About QMHC

The Queensland Mental Health Commission was established in July 2013 to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders by driving ongoing reform.

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