



Queensland  
**Mental Health and Drug  
Advisory Council**

## Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council meeting Brisbane, Queensland (17 July 2020)

### COMMUNIQUE

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The mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were in sharp focus at the Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council's July meeting.

The online meeting discussed the [National Pandemic Mental Health and Wellbeing Response Plan](#) (the National Plan) endorsed by National Cabinet on 15 May 2020. The National Plan identifies three immediate actions to alter the trajectory of pandemic-related mental health effects and to limit future adverse outcomes and outlines 10 key response and recovery priority areas.

It will be reviewed and updated to ensure it considers the mental wellbeing of all Australians during and after the pandemic, along with impacts on social and economic prosperity.

#### *The Queensland response*

Ivan Frkovic, Queensland Mental Health Commissioner said the Commission was working with the Queensland Health Department of Health's Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch to develop a response to the National Plan, considering actions to address the mental health and wellbeing needs of Queenslanders. Stakeholders including the PHN, the non-government sector, and several peak bodies were supporting development of Queensland's response.

#### *Cross-sectoral meetings*

The Commission has convened a series of COVID-19 cross-sectoral meetings to help identify mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector issues, challenges, along with opportunities for collective responses across public, private and non-government organisations.

The Commissioner and Executive Director also attend fortnightly meetings with the National Mental Health Commission and other jurisdictions to discuss and report on the responses to the pandemic.

#### *Communication and engagement*

The Council commended the Commission for a comprehensive range of pandemic response [mental health and wellbeing communication and engagement activities and resources, including:](#)

- developing and promoting help-seeking material through the Commission's web site and electronic newsletter, and through media and social media channels
- contributing to Government and non-government agencies supporting workforce and community mental health and wellbeing
- helping State Government departments provide pandemic mental health and wellbeing webinars and fact sheets tailored to specific needs.

#### *Funding for community services*

The Commissioner gave an update on the State Government's allocation of \$30 million to support community mental health, drug and alcohol, and Indigenous primary healthcare services responding to the pandemic. He said funding supported 212 grants.

The Council commended Queensland Health on delivering a well-managed and supportive process during this challenging time. The Council recommended the further consider be given to future funding needs for the sector into the new financial year.

### **Regional mental health and AOD**

A panel discussion on the regional mental health and AOD challenges and successes during the pandemic featured:

***Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) Mental Health Services Manager Tim Shaw***, –who discussed creative ways in which the RFDS supported continuation of stepped care services to remote communities – including working around the human biosecurity emergency arrangements and adjusting service delivery to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable populations.

***Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Mental Health and Addiction Services General manager Lisa Newport***, who gave an overview of work to support the transition of Community Care Unit (CCU) consumers to their home environments during the lockdown, and outlined workforce personal protective equipment (PPE) support and social distancing education for consumers to protect consumer and staff wellbeing.

***Brisbane South Primary Health Network (PHN) General Manager Commissioned Programs Lucille Chalmers*** highlighted the PHN's role in supporting general practice and residential care readiness during lockdown, and its work to support safe continuation of mental health services.

***Richmond Fellowship Queensland Executive Manager North Queensland Jeremy Audas*** outlined key themes emerging from work with Townsville government and non-government agencies and community groups, including the impact on young people such as 2020 school leavers and students, and increased reporting of family violence and AOD and mental health issues during the pandemic.

The role of telehealth was a key theme throughout the discussion, and it was acknowledged as an effective adjunct to help meet service demand.

### **Updates and emerging issues**

#### ***Workplace mental health and wellbeing***

Jorgen Gullestrup told the Council that prequalification for building contractors' construction had been brought into line with Queensland Procurement Policy to ensure agency procurement practices focused on meeting the government's social objectives. All State Government pre-qualification contracts now include questions about suicide and mental health supports for staff. He said this had been well received by industry.

Mr Gullestrup said a report prepared by Griffith University's Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) for Mates in Construction had found that 27.3% of Queensland construction industry apprentices have experienced workplace bullying, and apprentices had high levels of exposure to suicidal behaviours. [The Impact of Workplace Bullying on Mental Health and Suicidality in Queensland Construction Industry Apprentices](#) report is publicly available.

#### ***Community strategies***

Dr Ignacio Correa Velez discussed the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) work with Multicultural Australia and community leaders from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to develop strategies to support individual communities during the pandemic.

He said a community-led process had established working groups to look at issues including COVID-19 communication, children and families, economic security, domestic and family violence, youth, and mental health. Several mental health training initiatives had been introduced to help community leaders support the mental health and wellbeing of their communities.

#### ***Refugees and asylum seekers in detention***

Council members discussed concern for the mental health and wellbeing of men held at the Kangaroo Point Alternative Place of Detention (APOD), in a situation exacerbated by the pandemic. The Council supported

Commission action to advocate for the men to be detained in a community setting instead of their current situation.

***Vulnerable students***

Consideration of home-schooling and other pandemic-related issues for vulnerable families highlighted there was no common approach to assess individual students' needs or support their access to technology.

Council members said families had reported how some students, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, had been disadvantaged during the lockdown period because they didn't have the required technology and supports.

**Next meeting**

The next meeting is planned for late September 2020. Inquiries about this communique can be made to the Council Secretariat on [council@qmhc.qld.gov.au](mailto:council@qmhc.qld.gov.au).

HP record 2020/3180