



Queensland
**Mental Health and Drug
Advisory Council**

Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council regional visit Townsville, Queensland (13-14 November 2018)

COMMUNIQUE

The Mental Health Commissioner, Mr Ivan Frkovic and the Commission's Executive Director, Dr Leanne Geppert accompanied the Council to Townsville for its second regional visit for the year. The visit was supported by Council member, [Mr Jeremy Audas](#), who provided the local lead.

During the visit, the Commissioner, Executive Director and the Council Chair, [Professor David Kavanagh](#) attended a meeting with the Townsville Hospital and Health Service Board Chair, Chief Executive and invited Executive staff to discuss some of local emerging issues, innovations and achievements.

Townsville Community events

The Council hosted three forums across the two-day visit; a Community Roundtable meeting, a Community Stakeholder dinner, and a networking breakfast meeting. In addition, the Council attended a meeting hosted by the North Queensland Alliance for Mental Health and visited three local non-government organisations.

The Council events were supported by local guest speakers, Professor Zoltán Sarnyai, Professor of Pharmacology, James Cook University; and Mr Brendon Marty, Project Manager, Tropical Brain and Mind Foundation.

Community Stakeholder Roundtable meeting

The roundtable discussions, facilitated by the Commission in partnership with Mr Audas, provided an opportunity for key government, non-government and community networks and representatives to discuss emerging whole-of-government reform directions and priorities in relation to improving mental health and wellbeing, and reducing the impact of mental illness, problematic alcohol and other drugs use, and suicide. The discussions were centred on the focus areas of the Whole of Government Strategic Plan – *Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023*: better lives through person-centred and integrated services and investing to save through improved population mental health and early intervention.

During the roundtable meeting, the stakeholder group shared some of the important work already underway in the Townsville region to address local mental health and wellbeing issues through group discussions and presentations to the broader group.

The general feedback received from attendees was this was a highly valued meeting that brought together a broad range of cross-sector stakeholders and service providers.

The outcomes from the roundtable discussion will be used to assist the Commission in identifying how the work underway in Townsville and the surrounding region connects and aligns with the emerging reform agenda and the whole of government Strategic Plan – [Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#).

Community Stakeholder dinner

The dinner provided an opportunity for key government, non-government and community representatives to network and discuss the current and emerging challenges and priorities for the local(?) current mental health and wellbeing agenda.

Professor Zoltán Sarnyai, from James Cook University provided a thought provoking presentation on the role of stress and trauma in mental illness, with a discussion on how to objectively measure stress and mitigate its effects on mental health.

Networking breakfast meeting

Mr Brendon Marty, Project Manager for the [Townsville Mentally Healthy City Project](#) attended the networking breakfast as the key guest speaker.

Mr Marty discussed how the Australian-first program will contribute to improving the mental health and wellbeing of the Townsville local community; acknowledging the possible long-term benefits, that include the development of a comprehensive, easily navigated website with a one-stop approach to mental health services; and a platform to integrate and facilitate national and local service organisations and Queensland Health tertiary specialist services.

The project is supported by a number of key organisations that include Beyondblue, Townsville City Council, the Northern Queensland Primary Health Network, Townsville Hospital and Health Service, as well as numerous smaller NGOs and service providers working in the Townsville area. The Commission has been invited to participate on the Project's Steering Committee Reference Group, to help oversee the implementation of the project.

Mr Marty advised that once established, this initiative could be rolled out to nearby regions and potentially nationally in the future.

The Council acknowledged the Tropical Brain and Mind Research Foundation for its role in bringing the Mentally Healthy City Project to Townsville, and for its commitment in empowering the local community members to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Council site visits to local non-government organisations

The Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service, Stagpole Street Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Unit and the Salvation Army Recovery Services hosted Council visits to their respective services. The Council strongly commended these services and their staff, and highlighted the following observations that were made during the visits: The cultural and therapeutic community setting provided by Stagpole Street Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Unit, that utilises systemic family therapy as its primary treatment modality.

- [Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service's](#) multidisciplinary team and programs that include the Lighthouse (a youth diversionary program aimed to support youth aged between 10 to 16 years); and the First 1000 days (a program that supports the foundation for strong families with good health, wellbeing and rich culture).
- The [Salvation Army Recovery Service's](#) outstanding holistic program and purpose-built 33-bed residential rehabilitation facility, that is supported with a holistic and therapeutic framework and evidence-based intervention supports and residential treatment.

Observations from the Townsville visit

The Council thanks the Townsville community and sector participants for their hospitality and openness with sharing of information.

The Council also acknowledges the leadership provided by Ms Cathy O'Toole MP, Federal Member for Herbert and Cr Coleen Doyle, who represented the Townsville City Council Mayor at the various community stakeholder events.

During discussion with local stakeholders, the Council heard of the considerable challenges facing the North Queensland health system, that include:

- the level of stress and trauma experienced by defence personnel and their families
- the diverse population groups' cultural needs and priorities
- the large proportion of its transient population
- the rate of suicide being three times higher than Australia in general.

The local stakeholders also discussed how the following has an impact on service improvement and population outcomes:

- current integration and coordination between Hospital and Health Services, Primary Health Networks and the broader health and community services.
- how collaboration between services can be influenced by funding competition.
- current utilisation of local existing infrastructure (libraries, schools and sporting facilities).

The Council acknowledge there are a number of existing services, resources, and local investment already committed in addressing some of these challenges; including the following initiatives:

- [Operation Compass project](#), a suicide prevention trial, supported by the Northern Queensland Primary Health Network to provide seed funding for ten Townsville resilience and wellbeing programs focuses on ex-serving members and their families.
- The North Queensland Cowboys partnership with [The Resilience Project](#) to deliver a school-based program, which helps to build resilient, positive and mentally healthy primary and secondary school communities through its school-based program.
- The Housing and Homelessness hubs program, a key initiative of the [Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027](#) supported by the Department of Housing and Public Works and community housing partners to develop housing and homelessness hubs, that provide greater choice and opportunities for housing solutions that meet individual's needs.

The Council was equally interested in hearing the views from the local networks such as the North Queensland Alliance for Mental Health and the [Townsville Suicide Prevention Network](#).

The Commissioner advised the Council that feedback provided during the stakeholder roundtable and meeting discussions will be considered with the implementation of whole of government Strategic Plan – [Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#).

The Council will use the information gathered during the visit to Townsville when providing the Commission with advice in relation to the implementation of the Whole of Government Strategic Plan – [Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#).

Council meeting discussions

Renewal of the Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan

The Council was advised that the *Shifting Minds: Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023* will be launched by the Minister for Health, the Honourable Steven Miles MP, during the [Leading Reform Summit](#).

Drug safety checking reform in Queensland

The Council provided its support for the Commission to continue promoting a balanced and considered discussion about drug safety checking and other innovative harm reduction measures through the Commission led events and social media channels, and through the implementation of the Strategic Plan – [Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#).

Queensland Productivity Commission submission

The Council was advised that the Commission has made a submission to the [Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into imprisonment and recidivism](#) to determine how government resources and policies may be best used to reduce imprisonment and recidivism to improve outcomes for the community.

In responding, the Commission considered approaches consistent with its role and that of the vision for the *Shifting Minds: Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023*.

Human Rights

The Council welcomed the news that a Human Rights Bill was recently introduced into Queensland Parliament and referred to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, with the Committee due to report by 30 April 2019. The Council was invited to provide comment on the [Commission's submission](#).

Next meeting

The 2019 Council Calendar of events is currently being finalised and is expected to be published by early 2019.

If you have any enquiries relating to the Communique, please contact the Council Secretariat via email at: Council@qmhc.qld.gov.au.