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Renewed focus on physical wellbeing to improve mental health

The Queensland Mental Health Commission has pledged support to an initiative focused on promoting the physical health of people living with mental illness.

As part of a national commitment, the Commission has endorsed a call for greater attention to improving quality of life and bridging the life expectancy gap between people living with mental illness and the general population.

Effective health promotion, prevention and early intervention and a holistic, person centred approach are among the essential elements outlined in the *Equally Well Consensus Statement*, launched this week by the National Mental Health Commission.

With the support of state and territory mental health commissions, government and non-government health service providers and community organisations, the statement calls for equity of access to quality health care.

While equality in health is a basic human right for all Australians, many factors contribute to poorer physical health outcomes for people with mental illness.

Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Ivan Frkovic said: "Queenslanders who experience mental illness are twice as likely to experience cardiovascular disease and more likely to suffer other long-term health conditions such as cancer and diabetes that can reduce life expectancy."

According to the Commission's *2016 Performance Indicators Report*, Queenslanders with mental illness are more likely to consume alcohol at risky levels and smoke tobacco daily.

They are also less likely to undertake physical activity which, when combined with other factors such as the effects of some medications, increases the risk of experiencing chronic and life-threatening physical health conditions.

The *Consensus Statement* seeks action from across the health sector to improve physical as well as mental health. It calls for better collaboration and coordination between governments, professional bodies, social and community services and other leaders in mental health to make physical health of people living with mental illness a national priority.

These goals are consistent with Queensland's blueprint for mental health action, the *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014-2019*, and the Queensland



Mental Health Commission's role in driving reform.

Mr Frkovic said: "The Commission had a strong focus on physical health through its *Stronger Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Grants Program* this year."

Funded projects included:

- A 16-week mental health and wellbeing project for Sunshine Coast seniors (over 50) living with a mental illness or those wanting to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Under the program up to 30 seniors set personal goals for physical health, and work with peer support to develop cognitive and physical tools to improve mental health and wellbeing (**\$44,000 — Sunshine Coast Council**).
- Development of a *Healthy Minds & Bodies* program in southern Brisbane and Logan with easily accessible and supported physical activity programs to improve social opportunities for people living with a mental illness and intellectual disability (**\$46,500 — Karakan**).
- A Far North Queensland program to improve physical health and community connections for Indigenous adults recovering from mental illness. The project involves capacity building to enable sustained delivery (**\$49,800 — Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association in partnership with Queensland Institute of Medical Research**).
- The Healthy Active Lifestyle Program for members at a Brisbane clubhouse including workshops on nutrition, diet, mobility and stretching, aerobic, cardiovascular and strength training exercises to improve quality of life, overall mental wellbeing and recovery (**\$28,700 — Stepping Stones Clubhouse**).

As a signatory to the *Equally Well Consensus Statement*, the Commission will continue to promote the importance of a holistic, person centred approach to physical and mental health and wellbeing.