



Queensland
**Mental Health and Drug
Advisory Council**

Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council regional visit Longreach, Queensland (18-19 September 2018)

COMMUNIQUE

The Council members agreed to host several of its meetings in regional, rural and remote communities to support the Council in establishing connections with its regional partners and stakeholders, and to gain a better understanding of the regional issues, and strategies for improving community mental health and wellbeing.

The Mental Health Commissioner, Mr Ivan Frkovic and Executive Director, Dr Leanne Geppert accompanied the Council to Longreach for its inaugural regional visit. Council member, [Ms Jane Williams](#) provided the local lead.

During the visit, the Commissioner and Dr Geppert attended the Central West Mental Health Roundtable. The event was hosted by the Western Queensland Primary Health Network (WQPHN); bringing together key stakeholders from across Local Government Authorities, Rural Financial Counselling Services, WQPHN Commissioned Service Providers and the Central West Hospital and Health Service (CWHHS) to explore ideas for greater integration, collaboration and client centred service provision.

Longreach Community events

The Council hosted three forums across the two-day visit; a facilitated discussion, a community stakeholder dinner and a networking breakfast meeting. These events provided an opportunity to discuss the local issues, challenges and successes for the Central West Queensland region.

Stakeholder facilitated discussion

The Council invited representatives from community, government and non-government organisations to provide individual presentations.

Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board

Mr David Arnold, Chief Executive Officer from the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) discussed the RAPAD model and its role in supporting community mental health and wellbeing. RAPAD, a regional organisation comprising of seven local government councils, facilitates and promotes the sustainable growth and development of the Central Western Queensland region.

The Council was interested in hearing about RAPAD's holistic approach to wellbeing and its partnership with WQPHN to support optimum service delivery and investment for the region.

Central West Suicide Prevention Network

The Council was briefed by Mr David Kerrigan on the region's suicide prevention services and supports. In particular, health education programs targeted towards men. The Council was advised of the current initiatives being rolled out, that include the annual [Look After Your Mates forum](#), coordinated in partnership with the Central West Health, Queensland Police Services, Lives Lived Well, James Cook University and the RSL Subbranch. The forum's theme for this year is focused on post-traumatic stress disorder.

Rural Financial Counselling Service

Ms Rachel Bock discussed the Rural Financial Counselling Service's (RFCS) role in supporting financial and mental health burden, and its partnership with the Central West Rural Wellness Network to provide support & advocacy services to communities across Central West Queensland.

The Council was advised that in addition to providing a rural financial counselling service to primary producers and small rural businesses experiencing financial difficulties, the RFCS Counsellors also support client referrals to various professional mental health services.

Outback Futures

The Outback Futures Board of Directors Chairman, Mr Peter Whip shared with the Council that Outback Futures is a not-for-profit organisation that provides allied health services to rural and remote Central West Queensland.

The Council was interested to learn that the organisation offers a 'one stop shop' multidisciplinary approach to care, with a wide range of services and resources, including allied and mental health services and tele-health platforms and programs.

One of the current challenges for Outback Futures is financial sustainability. Outback Futures relies on donations for 85% of its funding source.

Central West Report

Inspector Mark Henderson from the Queensland Police Service provided the Wellbeing Report for Central West.

Inspector Henderson discussed his role on the Central West Rural Wellness Network and the ways that the Queensland Police Service works toward improving mental health and saving lives with its wellness program. He stressed with the Council the importance of keeping the narrative positive with reporting and media.

Royal Flying Doctor Service

Mr Tim Shaw, Mental Health Services Manager from the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) spoke about RFDS's work in providing social and emotional wellbeing and mental health services, in rural and remote communities.

Mr Shaw acknowledged that although there are no major differences with common mental health and substance use risk factors, compared to other regions, there is an exacerbated risk of mental health and problematic substance use for rural and remote communities as a result of insufficient early intervention and prevention services.

Mr Shaw spoke of RFDS's role in breaking down barriers to services, and the importance of services being agile and adaptive to remain relevant. The RFDS engage with communities seeking support and focus service delivery on the service gaps that communities identify.

One of the current challenges for RFDS is recruiting and retaining quality staff. The RFDS has a number of vacant [Mental Health Clinician positions](#) for the Mt Isa, Charleville and Longreach Drought Wellbeing Teams.

Western Queensland Drought Appeal

Mr David Phelps spoke about his work with the Western Queensland Drought Appeal; noting that although Central West is doing it tough – the community is resilient. He discussed the power of networking and fostering relationships and the importance of using factual information to identify social and mental health issues and developing appropriate responses.

Central West Hospital and Health Service

Regional Adversity Integrated Care Clinician, Mr Jamie Small spoke about Queensland Health's Tackling Regional Adversity through Integrated Care (TRAIC) program. The TRAIC program incorporates suicide prevention, building resilience, and fostering recovery for communities affected by drought, disaster and other community crises. The program is designed to support the community's sustained ability to withstand and recover from adversity.

Mr Small discussed how he collaborates with the community, government and non-government service providers to build community resilience and to foster inter-agency approaches that improve resilience and referral pathways to treatment and support programs.

Longreach Regional Council

Cr Ed Warren, Mayor of the Longreach Regional Council attended the networking breakfast as the key guest speaker.

The Council was interested to hear that Central West shares the same vision as the Commission in working together to improve mental health and wellbeing.

Cr Warren acknowledged that mental health is a key priority for the region, and that there has been an increased investment with allied health staff positions. During his presentation he discussed his role with RAPAD and ways that the Longreach Regional Council supports the region's resilience by supporting community networks, supporting the development the community's diverse and innovative economy, and extending infrastructure and services.

Observations from the Longreach visit

The Council thanks Central West for their hospitality and openness with sharing of information.

The Council applauds the Central West region for its use of creative and positive approaches to build and maintain community resilience; and for its ability to work collaborating with each other. The Council made the following specific observations:

- The Central West Queensland health system faces considerable challenges. Communities across the region have experienced their fair share of adversity in recent years. A protracted drought has had significant effects across the community, from farms, to local businesses, local services and community groups.
- Concern over the long-term sustainability for [Outback Futures](#) that rely on private donations for its funding source; and the potential impact on the community if this service was to discontinue.
- Attracting and retaining a flexible, skilled and well-connected workforce for Central West remains challenging and needs innovative approaches.
- Stigma remains a major barrier to people seeking help. This issue is being addressed by the region with community events that offer opportunities for 'safe conversations' and creating ways for people to discreetly access mental health support.
- The Central West community should be consulted on all future service investment decisions because it is best placed to fully understand its current and ongoing service needs.
- The powerful impact of the community's respectful partnership and collaboration between local, State and Federal governments with community and non-government organisations.
- The importance of supporting and maintaining positive narrative when talking about Central West's mental health and wellbeing.

The Commissioner advised that the renewed Strategic Plan will consider factors relevant to rural and remote models of care and support, and early intervention capacity and responses.

Council meeting discussions

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

The Council was pleased to hear that *Shifting Minds: Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023* was approved by Queensland Government.

The Strategic Plan sets the five-year direction for a whole-of-person, whole-of-community and whole-of-government approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders, and preventing and reducing the impact of mental illness, problematic alcohol and other drug use, and suicide.

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

The Council welcomes the recent announcement of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety; examining the quality of residential aged care services for senior and young populations.

The Council noted that although the terms of reference are yet to be determined, it is expected that the Royal Commission will examine the challenge of providing care to people with disabilities living in residential aged care, particularly younger people with disabilities and the challenges of supporting people suffering dementia.

The Council has encouraged the Commission to collaborate with the other mental health commissions and provide a joint submission to the Royal Commission.

Human Rights–Involuntary treatment

In 2017, the Federal Attorney-General assured the Mental Health Commissions that they would be consulted on the development of the national oversight mechanisms for places of detention, including psychiatric hospitals and units. This was part of the Government's commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). The Australian Government ratified OPCAT in December 2017.

The Council was advised that in June 2018, the Human Rights Commission released a second and final consultation paper on the proposals made in the interim report regarding how the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) should be implemented in Australia. The Council noted that submissions have since closed, and that the Human Rights Commission is expecting to publish a report early 2019.

The Council noted that the Commissioner attended a Roundtable discussion on OPCAT implementation in Australia on 14 September 2018.

The Council supports the Commission's position that all mental health services should be provided within a recovery oriented and least restrictive framework. The Council encouraged the Commissioner to use this opportunity to discuss with Queensland Health what progress has been made in relation to promoting recovery-orientated, least restrictive practices, and to report back to the Council.

Drug checking at music festivals

The Council acknowledged the recent tragic deaths at the Defqon.1 dance festival in Sydney which resulted from drug overdoses and supports the commencement of dialogue surrounding the introduction of pill testing trials to reduce drug related harm at music festivals. The Council agreed for a dedicated discussion at the next Council meeting.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Council is planned to be held in Townsville on 13-14 November 2018.

For any enquiries relating to the Communique please contact the Council Secretariat: Council@qmhc.qld.gov.au.