

Age Well Working Group

August 2016

On 11 August 2016, the Queensland Mental Health Commission and the Council on the Ageing Queensland co-hosted the first meeting of the Age Well Working Group.

The working group brings together government agencies and their non-government partners to support the implementation of the *Early Action: Queensland Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Action Plan 2015–17*, through a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of older Queenslanders.

The first meeting comprised representatives from:

- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Council on the Ageing Queensland
- Aged and Community Services Australia
- Ageing Mind Initiative: University of Queensland
- Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland
- Carers Queensland
- Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
- Department of Health and Ageing (Australian Government)
- Department of Social Services (Australian Government)
- Older Person's Health Clinical Network
- Statewide Older Persons Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Clinical Group
- Queensland Aged and Disability Advocacy
- Queensland Health
- Queensland Men's Shed Association Inc.
- Brisbane North Primary Healthcare Network.

The working group was provided an overview of current strategies, practices and research on improving older person's mental health and wellbeing. Discussion focused on what we are doing well for mental health and ageing in Queensland, what we need to do better, and what role the working group can play.

Strategic priorities in mental health and wellbeing and ageing

There are a range of Queensland Government priorities strategies with implications for how we support the mental health and wellbeing of older Queenslanders.

The [Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019](#) seeks to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders through a focus on:

- better services
- better awareness, prevention and early intervention
- better engagement and collaboration
- better transparency and accountability.

A series of whole-of-government action plans have been developed to support the Strategic Plan, including [Early Action: Queensland Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Action Plan 2015–17](#).

Age Well is one of five priority areas identified in this Action Plan. This priority area focuses on supporting mentally health and active ageing, improving access to support services and early detection and appropriate management of mental health issues.

The [Queensland: an age friendly community](#) action plan outlines actions to be taken by government and non-government agencies across the eight age-friendly domains recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO):

- outdoor spaces
- transport
- housing
- social participation
- respect and social inclusion
- civic participation and employment
- communication and information
- community support and health services.

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Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services are leading the implementation and monitoring of this action plan.

The Council on the Ageing Queensland has also been working with city councils in Brisbane and Redlands on becoming age-friendly cities, consistent with the WHO guidelines.

[*My health, Queensland's future: Advancing health 2026*](#) is a 10 year strategy for Queensland's health system. The strategy aims for Queenslanders to become among the healthiest in people in the world by:

- promoting wellbeing
- delivering health care
- connecting healthcare
- pursuing innovation.

This strategy recognises that improving the health of Queenslanders requires concerted action to promote healthy behaviours, prevent illness and injury and address the social determinants of health. The strategy also recognises the importance of consumers being engaged as equal partners in their health care.

In keeping with this Strategy, Queensland Health is developing an Older Persons Statewide Policy that will articulate an overarching approach for planning, investing and delivering health services for older Queenslanders. This will be followed by an Older Persons Statewide Services Plan.

Clinical perspectives on the mental health and wellbeing of older Queenslanders

Dr Sandra Thomson from the Statewide Older Persons Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Clinical Group gave a clinical perspective on mental health care for older persons, and highlighting opportunities to enhance mental health care services into the future.

A case study was used to illustrate the importance of working across health settings to detect and address mental health problems among older persons. It was noted that mental health presentations are often first detected within a general health service context.

The ability to successfully liaise across health settings (e.g. primary care, general medical services, specialist mental health teams, and community services) is recognised as critically important to providing mental health care to older persons.

Being flexible in the way mental health care is provided for older persons across different locations and settings is also seen as essential. What works in one location may not work well in another.

Building the evidence base for supporting healthy ageing

Professor Nancy Pachana provided an overview of latest research on older person's mental health and wellbeing, and the work of the University of Queensland's Ageing Mind Initiative.

The Ageing Mind Initiative has been established as a focal point for clinical and translational ageing-related research in a mental health context at the University of Queensland.

The Ageing Mind Initiative has been leading a wide range of research projects, including research with tangible applications for supporting older person's mental health and wellbeing. Examples include:

- evaluating role of social networks in maintaining good health into older age
- expanding the CarFreeMe program to support the wellbeing of older persons who are ceasing driving
- developing tools to identify mental health issues in older populations (e.g. Geriatric Anxiety Inventory).

Current evidence highlights the importance of social networks and engagement, physical health and exercise, education and cognitive activity in maintaining good mental health and wellbeing as we age.

Identifying what we are doing well and could do better

The working group identified a range of areas where Queensland is doing well in terms of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of older Queenslanders:

- increased interest in and discussion about the importance of ageing well
- developments in e-health and virtual health supports
- promoting personal choice and the consumer voice in health care planning and delivering
- investing in research that focuses on healthy ageing
- clarifying the responsibilities of the federal and state government in supporting healthy ageing
- adopting a more systems approach to health care (e.g. linking primary, secondary and tertiary services)

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- reducing stigma associated with aging and mental health issues among older persons.

It was recognised that while there have been welcome developments in each of these areas, there was still room to build on these achievements. Some of the areas needing particular focus were:

- translating research on healthy ageing into practice
- using social media to communicate the importance of mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan.
- improving the way we support people to make life transitions, including transitions from the workplace
- enhancing continuity of care and support across health, community, and aged care services
- educating new and existing health professional about the importance of aging well and how to support it
- promoting health literacy for older persons, including guidelines and support for Consumer Directed Care
- refining the implementation of resources like My Aged Care.

The need for different levels of government to align their approaches to supporting our aging population was also noted. Existing structures like COAG have an important role to play in coordinating state and federal activity.

Our next steps

The Ageing Well Working Group will continue to inform the implementation of *Early Action: Queensland Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Acton Plan 2015–17*.

The group will also help shape the future of the *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014–2019* and associated action plans. Further advice will be provided on the process for reviewing of the Strategic Plan in the near future.

The next meeting of the Age Well Working Group will be in early 2017.

Further information

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