



MEDIA RELEASE

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Crucial role of WA's mental health community support in spotlight as part of new campaign

COMMUNITY mental health services have proven their weight in gold during the COVID-19 pandemic supporting people with mental health challenges in their own homes, and often remotely, to ensure hospitals are available to respond to the virus.

Despite increased demand and shifting to an isolated work environment, the response by the community mental health sector has vindicated the long-held call for proper and immediate increased investment in community-based services now and beyond the pandemic.

A new state election campaign called **Prevent Support Heal** has been launched by the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) to secure a boost in funding for WA community mental health services to address the persistent over-reliance and expenditure on hospital-based services.

As the State and Federal Governments look toward a social, health and economic recovery beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the Prevent Support Heal campaign will detail how the mental health sector can contribute to that recovery with proper investment in these services.

The investment modelling is based on the WA Government's own 10 Year mental health plan *Better Choices, Better Lives*, which clearly outlines the need to balance the mental health system, reducing both the pressure and costs within the public health system by millions.

WAAMH chief executive officer Taryn Harvey said the commendable action of the community mental health sector during the pandemic had demonstrated its flexibility, innovation and localised knowledge, placing people with mental health issues at the forefront of their decision-making.

"WA's community mental health services have carried the load in caring for people with mental health issues through the COVID-19 pandemic, because of their demonstrably adaptive actions to keep people well in their own homes and away from Emergency Departments," Ms Harvey said.

"We have seen people with mental health challenges staying away from hospitals during the pandemic, meaning demand for community-based services has soared, with some services experiencing more clients who wouldn't normally reach out because of the increased anxiety and uncertainty surrounding the pandemic."

The Prevent Support Heal campaign will bring together people with lived experiences, their friends and family, and the services that support them to highlight how we want to work together with Government to finally balance WA's mental health system and progress the plan.

Prevent, Support, Heal

When you're in, we can win!

PREVENT.
SUPPORT.
HEAL.



While large sums of money have been injected into what's known as 'community treatment', sub-acute systems and 'community-based services' - and these services have a role to play in the system too – they still remain clinical models of care.

The campaign will call for a boost to community supports and prevention in our mental health system first – which both Government's own plans and people with lived experience have widely endorsed.

“There is an over reliance on hospital and clinical services as the primary response to mental health challenges, which is opposite to the plan's description for the optimal mix of services for WA's population,” Ms Harvey said.

“After the pandemic eases we cannot return to a situation which continues to underfund these services, already operating on a shoestring and evolving to continue to care for people with mental health issues.”

WAAMH president Kerry Hawkins - herself a carer of someone with mental health challenges and one of the National Mental Health Commissioners - said WA's mental health system continued to direct the majority of spending on hospital beds and inpatient services, reinforcing old structures.

“It has never been more important to properly fund these services and as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown and this campaign will highlight these community supports and prevention programs can make the biggest difference yet remain the most critically under-funded areas of the mental health system,” Ms Hawkins said.

“We need a dramatic shift to prevent mental health issues from developing or worsening, and provide equitable access to holistic, recovery-focused, community support which keeps people living well in their own homes, in jobs and connected to loved ones in the community, resulting in less admissions to hospitals.”

“This evidence-based approach will not only support people to live their best lives with self-direction and hope when they're feeling most vulnerable, and reduce excessive pressure on health care professionals, it will also result in lowered costs for the public health system.”

A recent audit on access to adult mental health services by the Auditor General further reinforced these findings and was critical of the lack of progress in advancing a better balance of service mix.

“Over the next year, you'll hear from people from many walks of life who care about the range of mental health options available to them,” Ms Harvey said.

“We are calling on people with mental health challenges, their families, friends, and the organisations which support them and prevent issues spiralling to crisis points, to band together and join the campaign now and right up until the State Election in 2021, to secure this vital funding.”

The campaign website: preventsupportheal.org.au

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An initiative of your community
mental health peak body



WAAMH
Western Australian Association
for Mental Health

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Campaign asks:

- Funding to community mental health services to increase five-fold – from \$48 million to \$250 million
- An increase in prevention spend from 1% to 5% of total mental health spend.

Fact Box:

- We need five times as much community support as we have now.
- Community support can only meet 20% of demand
- Only 1 in 5 people who need community support can access it
- In a balanced MH system, community support would make up 19% of the service mix (services) – now it sits at just 8%
- If we had the optimal mix of mental health services, prevention would make up 7% of all service delivery
- If we had a balanced mental health system, we would rely less on hospital beds – instead of making up 38% of services now, we'd need only 26% because people would be supported to live well in the community and avoid mental health crisis.
- 'Community treatment' and 'community supports' are not the same thing: community treatment is primarily for the symptom management of mental illness, while 'community supports' work alongside people to transform their lives through employment, connections, and personal recovery. They are complementary supports, both important in a balanced system. The problem is that community support remains a missing piece identified in the plan and it is still the missing piece. We need to instead make a fresh start with those services that will address the contributors to MH as the first step, that we see so amplified in the COVID crisis like jobs, homes, education and feeling safe and secure.
- Sometimes step-up, step-down services are referred to as 'community-based services', but again it's important to remember that step-up-step-down services – although one important part of a balanced mental health system - are a short term 'bridge' between people being in hospitals and re-joining the community. They don't provide long term support once people are back at home to help them build self-direction, resilience and independence – all the key building blocks to keeping people well, standing on their own feet and avoiding the need for acute services going forward.

Read here: [the Government's Mental Health Plan](#)

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