



Making mental health work better for regional communities

Despite their resilience and strength, regional communities in Western Australia are experiencing great need for better mental health support. Inadequate services, insufficient funding and difficulty in accessing support need to be urgently addressed.

The Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) worked with the University of Western Australia's Centre for Social Impact (CSI) to better understand:

- What is different about living in regional areas that leads to poorer mental health and difficulties accessing support?
- What further support is needed to improve the lives and wellbeing of people living in those communities?

The report 'Going the distance: Making mental health support work better for regional communities' explores these challenges and highlights the unique needs of rural communities including adaptations required for specific locations.

Participants reported the need for tailored, community specific services – be they community services that address the social determinants of mental health, peer support groups, education programs or treatment services.



Scan the QR code to download the full report.



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WAAMH

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for Mental Health

Key findings

- Regional communities experience significant life challenges and pressures, coupled with increased difficulties in accessing support for mental health and other issues
- There are gaps in supports available that address a holistic range of needs like social connections, financial security and physical wellbeing. Treating mental health in isolation, addressing symptoms only, and only providing crisis care without early intervention is not seen as appropriate or effective — especially in communities with high levels of stigma and low mental health literacy
- There are indicators of high distress, low wellbeing and ongoing unmet mental health needs, especially in young populations. There is also widespread concern about the mental health of young people and a lack of options for them to get the support they need early in life
- One-size-fits-all does not work for regional communities and there are no specific solutions that can be implemented across regional WA without detailed consultation and understanding of the characteristics, needs and dynamics of the local context

Priorities for action

After conversations about community needs, the people we consulted offered well-formed ideas for changes they believed would help them and their communities.

Four key action areas emerged from the consultation process:

1. Address the high levels of distress and low wellbeing by understanding social determinants as a key driver of poor mental health
2. Resource regional communities to promote mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour locally
3. Improve the accessibility of clinical supports and provide more options beyond clinical care
4. Engage local leadership in decision making to ensure that supports are relevant, effective and sustained

The report highlights the necessity for an urgent review of current funding models. State and Commonwealth Governments have recognised a need for increased services in rural areas, however the model of planning, commissioning and governance is ineffective.

The report provides recommendations for policy makers and commissioning services for an alternative approach to funding mental health services in rural communities.