



5 April 2019

Mental Health Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra ACT

**Ask for:** Kathleen McClusky  
**Phone:** 03 9932 1004  
**Our Ref:** A3061911

Dear Productivity Commission,

**Mental Health Inquiry: The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health Issues Paper**

Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health Issues Paper as part of the National Mental Health Inquiry.

Mental health is a key priority for Hobsons Bay, particularly for our young people. In this submission we highlight some key gaps, areas of focus, and priority populations to consider in the inquiry. This includes increasing funding for prevention, supporting co-location of services, and building the community health sector.

Please find attached our submission. If you have any questions please contact Kathleen McClusky, Manager Strategy and Advocacy on 9932 1004 or email [kmclusky@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au](mailto:kmclusky@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au).

We look forward to the outcomes and ongoing opportunities to be involved in the inquiry process.

Yours sincerely,

Pene Winslade  
**Director Sustainable Communities**

## **Mental Health Inquiry: The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health Issues Paper**

### Local context

The City of Hobsons Bay covers an area of 64 square kilometres, extending seven to 20 kilometres south-west of Melbourne's central business district, and is home to approximately 95,000 residents.

Local figures from the Victorian Population Health Survey 2014 show that approximately nine per cent of the Hobsons Bay population suffers from high to very high levels of psychological distress.<sup>1</sup>

Mental health is a particular concern for young people in Hobsons Bay. In 2015-16, the rate of in-patient admissions for 10 to 17 year olds (9.06 per 1,000 people) was higher than the rate for the Western Metropolitan Region (6.46 per 1,000 people) and Victoria (7.85 per 1,000 people). The rates for all three areas has increased since 2010-11.<sup>2</sup>

Local data suggests that secondary students (from years 7, 9 and 11) reported higher levels of psychological distress (20 per cent) in Hobsons Bay compared to in the Western Metropolitan Region (14 per cent) and in Victoria (13 per cent).<sup>3</sup> Six per cent of counselling requests in Hobsons Bay related to suicide or self-harm.<sup>4</sup>

Hobsons Bay has a significant gap in mental health support for young people. Service mapping of mental health services was conducted in Hobsons Bay in 2017. Some suburbs have a relatively high population of 12 to 25 year olds compared to other suburbs in the municipality however there is inadequate access to mental health services.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past five years, Council has committed itself to promoting youth mental health. In addition, through Youth Services, Council provides generalist and early intervention support to young people through the only dedicated free youth generalist counselling service based in Hobsons Bay. In 2015-16 the average wait time for this service was up to three weeks. This has increased up to 10 weeks at the end of July

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2015) *Victorian Population Health Survey 2014*

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2018), Victorian Admitted Episodes Dataset (VAED) 2017-18, DHHS, Melbourne

<sup>3</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010, Adolescent Community Profile, City of Hobsons Bay

<sup>4</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council. (2015) *Mental Health and Wellbeing in Hobsons Bay: Scoping Paper. The Role of Local Government*

<sup>5</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council. (2017). *Mental health services mapping analysis. An analysis of spatial mapping of mental health services for young people in and around Hobsons Bay*

2018. Council also provides direct support to local schools and offers Mental Health First Aid training to students and teachers, reaching up to 500 students per year.

Due to service gaps within the sector, Council has been working closely with Orygen to advocate for an increase in direct services within Hobsons Bay, including working in partnership with other mental health service providers to establish a satellite Headspace at the Newport Community Hub.

### **Gaps in current programs and supports available**

As outlined in the Issues Paper, the National Mental Health Commission highlighted that resources have been concentrated in costly acute and crisis care (such as hospital emergency departments), despite evidence of greater effectiveness of mental health services in community settings. In line with this observation, it is recommended that there is greater support and allocation of resources for mental health services in community settings within Hobsons Bay.

**Recommendation 1:** Allocate more funding for preventative and primary mental health resources in community settings.

#### *The need for integrated mental health services*

Psychological conditions is ranked as the most common ailment that patients talk to their General Practitioners (GPs) about.<sup>6</sup> However standalone GP settings may be poorly placed to provide people with adequate mental health care. On average, GP consultations typically fit into 15 minutes.<sup>7</sup> This alone may not be substantial for providing mental health support for complex cases. Therefore, an integrated model with co-location of services may be more beneficial.

Furthermore, the issues paper highlighted fragmentation and limited coordination across services,<sup>8</sup> which indicates a need for integrated services to support mental health.

The move to introduce youth mental health hubs in some Local Government Areas (LGAs) have been a welcome start. For example, Brimbank City Council, in partnership with key organisations, has established a hub where key services impacting young people's health and wellbeing are co-located. These services include support on completing education, support for young people from migrant and refugee

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<sup>6</sup> [RACGP](#). (2018). Health of the Nation: An annual insight into the state of general practice

<sup>7</sup> Britt, H., Valenti, L., Miller, G. Time for care. Length of general practice consultations in Australia. *Aust Fam Physician*. 2002; 31(9): 876-80

<sup>8</sup> NMHC (National Mental Health Commission) (2014). *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities: Report of the National Review of Mental Health Programs and Services*, Sydney.

backgrounds, mental health and counselling, alcohol and other drug services, legal support, and career support.<sup>9</sup>

This model addresses many features of youth mental health care such as affordability and convenience, holistic and timely initial assessment, welcoming environment, and coordinated care.<sup>10</sup>

Hobsons Bay residents, in particular our young people, currently lack equitable access to these services. With limited youth dedicated mental health services in Hobsons Bay, young people face a range of accessibility barriers. A key barrier is access to transport and travel times to seek support from services outside of the municipality. Currently a young person residing in Hobsons Bay is potentially required to undergo a one to two hour public transport round trip, excluding the consultation appointment, to access headspace at either Werribee or Sunshine.

Although a generalist youth counselling service exists within Hobsons Bay City Council's free Youth Service, it is not co-located with a range of other key health and wellbeing services specific for young people to support effective coordination. The biggest barrier to achieving a holistic model and coordination of services locally is the funding to have a range of services (such as mental health and counselling, alcohol and other drug services, legal support, and career support) available and co-located in Hobsons Bay.

There has been many examples nationally and internationally of integrated models of care, where key services such as primary, mental health, other allied health and support services are co-located and coordinated.<sup>11</sup> A range of benefits outlined by the World Health Organisation include reduced stigma, improved access to mental health services and treatment of co-morbidities, improved primary care to prevent hospital admissions, and improved workforce capacity through coordinated care.<sup>12</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** Prioritise funding for a satellite Headspace service model with co-location of youth support services to be located in Hobsons Bay at the Newport Community Hub.

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<sup>9</sup> Brimbank youth services. Visy Cares Hub. Available at <https://brimbankyouth.com/who-we-are/visy-cares-hub/>

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, M.P., et al. Identifying attributes of care that may improve cost-effectiveness in the youth mental health service system. *Med J Aust.* 2017; 2017 (10 Suppl): S27-S37

<sup>11</sup> Sector Connect Incorporated. (2017). Integrated Mental Health Service Project Final Report. Available at <http://www.sectorconnect.org.au/assets/Integrated-Mental-Health-Service-Project-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

### Co-morbidities and GP support

The issues paper indicated that 60 per cent of adults with a mental health disorder have a physical condition, compared to 50 per cent of other adults.<sup>13</sup> General Practitioners have an important role to play in this aspect and thereby require support in developing a range of specialised knowledge to manage presentations of co-morbidities. Hobsons Bay has fewer GPs than the Victorian average.<sup>14</sup> We welcome more opportunities and funding support for our local GPs to manage patients with co-morbidities.

**Recommendation 3:** Provide adequate support to attract and deliver capacity building activities to GPs in Hobsons Bay to manage co-morbidities.

### The National Disability Insurance Scheme and psychosocial disability

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) aims to assist individuals with disability to have choices over the support and services they access to help them to lead their lives. To be considered for NDIS eligibility, people must be aged between seven and 65 years, live in Australia and have citizenship or permanent residency or special category visa, and have a permanent disability that significantly affects their ability to take part in everyday activity.<sup>15</sup>

It has been estimated that the NDIS will have capacity for 460,000 participants at full roll out in 2019-20, with 64,000 people expected to have a primary psychosocial disability requiring support. However, a report published by The University of Sydney and Community Mental Health Australia has estimated that this means 91 per cent of people with severe mental illness, or between 166,000 to 626,000 people will have to rely on non-NDIS community mental health services.<sup>16</sup>

The report also indicates that there is a loss of organisations with expertise in psychosocial disability due to an inability to provide effective services within the NDIS costing structure, and funding is being transferred to the NDIS from programs where existing clients are not eligible for the NDIS, thereby causing a gap in services for people with severe mental illness.<sup>17</sup> The authors suggest that funding for existing programs serving people with psychosocial disability should continue until all clients

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<sup>13</sup> Productivity Commission. (2019) The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health. Issues Paper

<sup>14</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council (2018) Research Summary Snapshot of Health and Wellbeing in Hobsons Bay, Hobsons Bay City Council

<sup>15</sup> NDIS. (2018) About the NDIS <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us>

<sup>16</sup> Smith-Merry et al. (2018). Mind the Gap: The National Disability Insurance Scheme and psychosocial disability. Final Report: Stakeholder identified gaps and solutions. The University of Sydney and Community mental Health Australia.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

have a NDIS plan or they have transitioned to another funded program that meet their needs.<sup>18</sup> They also offer a comprehensive list of solutions to be implemented concurrently which should be considered.

Furthermore, only 6.4 per cent of the NDIS scheme participants have a primary psychosocial disability, which is half compared to the expected numbers (13.9 per cent) suggesting difficulties in implementing the scheme. Some individuals have reported that they frequently receive inappropriate plans or are unable to find services.<sup>19</sup> Intersectionality issues were also identified in engagement with the scheme including poor support from NDIS staff for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and poor culturally-specific support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.<sup>20</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** Further invest in the community health setting to ensure it has the capacity to support people who are unable to receive support through the NDIS.

### **Social Determinants of Mental Health**

In Council's recent submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health,<sup>21</sup> we articulated the importance of addressing the social determinants of mental health: social inclusion and connectedness; freedom from violence and discrimination; access to economic resources such as housing, income, education and employment; and urban design elements within the built and natural environment such as natural light and green spaces.<sup>22,23</sup>

Local Government is the closest level of government to the people and can play an important role in influencing the social determinants of health, for example, through infrastructure planning, community programs, and supporting local businesses. Funding that supports initiatives to reduce populations experiencing disadvantage to get better access to lifelong learning, opportunities for social participation and inclusion, affordable housing, access to open and green space will facilitate better outcomes for mental health.

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council (2019) Royal Commission into Mental Health Terms of Reference Consultation. Available at [https://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/council/advocacy/submissions-2019/hbccsub\\_royalcommissionmentalhealth\\_jan-2019.pdf](https://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/council/advocacy/submissions-2019/hbccsub_royalcommissionmentalhealth_jan-2019.pdf)

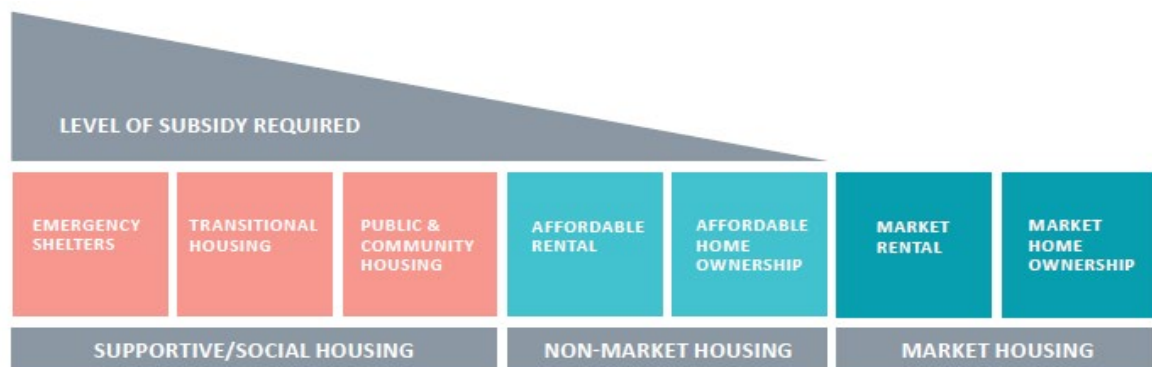
<sup>22</sup> Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. A Plan for Action 2005-2007. Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing.

<sup>23</sup> Townsend, Prof M and Weerasuriya, R, 2010, 'Beyond Blue to Green: The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context – Literature Review', Deakin University, Beyond Blue Ltd.

### Affordable housing

The literature suggests that investments in affordable housing has many benefits to individuals and the state, including: improved physical and mental health outcomes, reduced use of justice services, improved education, financial, and employment outcomes.<sup>24</sup> A review conducted by the University of Melbourne found that the benefit exceeds the cost for supporting someone to move from sleeping rough to social, public or supportive accommodation by a factor of 2.31.<sup>25</sup>

A Melbourne Apartments Project study looked at the cost and benefits associated with current public housing tenants moving out of public housing into affordable homeownership.<sup>26</sup> The Melbourne Apartments Project assisted eligible public housing tenants to move out of public housing and into home ownership by utilising an affordable purchasing arrangement. Eligible residents were those who lived within four kilometres of the project and were able to demonstrate their ability to save for a small deposit and make regular repayments. The researchers estimated the state would receive \$2.19 for every \$1 spent on the project with the benefits attributed to the recently vacated public housing dwellings (resulting from the project) being reallocated to a high-needs applicant on the Public housing waitlist.<sup>27</sup> If every vacated public housing dwelling was allocated to a high-needs applicant the government is estimated to save \$27,458.22 for every person moved into affordable homeownership.<sup>28</sup> Figure 1 illustrates different types of housing in Australia.



<sup>24</sup> Raynor, K, Palm, M, O'Neil, M and Whitzman, C. 2018. Investigating the costs and benefits of the Melbourne Apartments Project, Transforming Housing, The University of Melbourne

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

**Figure 1.** Housing spectrum (Whitzman, Newton, & Sheko, 2015)<sup>29</sup>

Hobsons Bay City Council is committed to ensuring households in the municipality are able to live in affordable, secure and appropriate housing that meets their needs, as outlined in our Affordable Housing Policy Statement 2016<sup>30</sup>. Council is in the process of developing an affordable housing trust, to increase the number of affordable housing available to residents in the municipality. We encourage the Federal and State Governments to invest in affordable housing strategies as it has numerous benefits including mental health and wellbeing.

**Recommendation 5:** Invest in local affordable housing initiatives to address social determinants of mental health.

### **Populations to consider**

There are some key population groups that need to be considered in relation to service delivery. In particular, children and young people, LGBTIQ+ community, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, older people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Barriers to accessing mental health services for these population groups, ensuring services are welcoming, staff are adequately trained in their needs, and service models provide an environment that is supportive is critical so they do not fall through the gaps.

**Recommendation 6:** Provide opportunities for priority populations to consult, identify barriers and inform mental health services and initiatives.

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<sup>29</sup> Taken directly from Raynor, K, Palm, M, O'Neil, M and Whitzman, C. (2018). Investigating the costs and benefits of the Melbourne Apartments Project, Transforming Housing, The University of Melbourne

<sup>30</sup> Hobsons Bay City Council. Affordable Housing Policy Statement 2016.  
<https://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/Council/Strategy-Planning/Social-policy-and-planning/Affordable-Housing-Policy-Statement>