

INQUIRY INTO EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND APPROPRIATE DELIVERY OF OUTPATIENT AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

HEARING – FRIDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2023

ReacOut Responses Post-hearing questions

1. Is there a centralised pathway that is integrated with both State and federally funded services that enables people to access the care they need at the time they want it?

No. Access to care in a timely manner is a significant challenge across the mental health system.

The Federal Government's Head to Health platform does seek to provide a central national portal for mental health service options, however, it is not integrated across all services and there are barriers to accessing the site for many people in need of care, including lack of awareness of the platform and incompatibility with help-seeking preferences.

2. How would the people you represent e.g consumers and mental health carers describe their ability to navigate the system and its varied pathways to service access?

Young people with mental health challenges and those who support them often say that navigating the mental health system and accessing the support they need is an enormous, sometimes overwhelming challenge.

For many, their mental health condition will make navigating a complex, fragmented system that is full of wrong doors and dead ends all the harder, if not impossible.

Young people have told us about experiences including:

- being discharged from hospital without further support being arranged*
- feeling that these services aren't able to provide adequate support*
- finding a lack of availability of services and support in regional areas*
- being turned away without pathways to other support services*
- being 'too well' for some services, but 'too unwell' for alternatives*
- being distressed as a result of poor experiences*
- finding a lack of cultural representation within services.*

Help-seeking barriers and enablers:

In addition to system navigability, young people generally face significant and varied barriers to help-seeking, including stigma, mental health literacy and access.

Conversely, there are also a range of facilitating factors that encourage or enable help-seeking. The below table outlines key facilitator themes observed in 3 studies.

Table 2 Key facilitator themes and number of studies (n = 3) in which theme addressed

#	Facilitator theme	Number of studies
1	Positive past experiences with help-seeking	3
2	Social support or encouragement from others	2
3	Confidentiality and trust in the provider	2
4	Positive relationships with service staff	2
5	Education and awareness	1
6	Perceiving the problem as serious	1
7	Ease of expressing emotion and openness	1
8	Positive attitudes towards seeking help	1

By their nature, digital services designed with and for young people increase equity and access to services - they are available in the evenings when many clinical services are closed, from anywhere in Australia with an internet connection, and in a non-clinical format that young people feel comfortable with.

ReachOut also specifically designs its services to both lower barriers to help-seeking and facilitate help-seeking. For instance, ReachOut PeerChat is a largely anonymous, text-based service, available in the afternoons and evenings (lowering barriers to access) that aims to foster positive relationships with service staff and trust in the provider (facilitating help-seeking).

3. Do any of these challenges or enablers extend to when a carer or consumer is wanting to escalate their concerns when health is deteriorating in the community?

ReachOut has significant engagement with parents and carers through our ReachOut Parents service which aims to support parents and carers of teenagers when they're facing tough times.

For many parents and carers, watching their teenager go through tough times can be really difficult. It can feel overwhelming and it can impact the entire family. They want to support the young people in their lives, but they tell us that knowing what to do isn't always easy. It can be a challenge just to find quality information and support parents feel they can trust, which can make the situation even harder to handle.

a. Can you tell us about their experience of this?

Parents need a variety of help, including access to information, connections to professional help, ways to improve communication with their teenagers, and personal/moral support. Unfortunately, many express difficulty in accessing the help they need, with finances and physical access both common barriers.

When they need support, talking to a partner or family member is the most common course, with GPs and teachers/school counsellors frequently consulted when more serious issues present.

4. Does your organisation have a direct line of contact to the NSW Department of Health?

ReachOut does not have a day to day contact in the NSW Department of Health.

a. If so, what division/section is your direct line of contact?

5. How many people (measured as full-time equivalents) work for your organisation on either a paid or voluntary basis?

As at 25 October 2023 ReachOut employs 68 FTE staff.

We also engage volunteers in a range of capacities for which a FTE metric is not available.

6. Does your organisation receive any funding or support, in any form, from the Commonwealth Government?

Reachout receives funding from the federal Department of Health and Department of Social Services.

a. If so, what was the amount in the 2021/2022 financial year?

\$6,719,095

b. If so, what was the amount in the 2022/2023 financial year?

\$7,546,163