

ACT Mental Health Advisory Council

Public Communique - Meeting 22

The ACT Mental Health Advisory Council (the Council) convened on 20 May 2021. The meeting was chaired by Sue-Ann Polden. Presentations were made about complaints processes in relation to mental health services.

Guide to Health Care Complaints in the ACT, Health Care Consumers Association

Sarah Spiller from the Health Care Consumers Association (HCCA) presented to the Council on the Community Health Literacy Project and Health Complaints Guide. Sarah reported that the Community Health Literacy Project's is a three year project funded by the ACT government and it is currently in its final year. The aims of the project are:

- A community sector workforce that is able to meet the information needs of consumers.
- To support the development of health literacy skills and knowledge for health care consumers.
- For health care services and professionals to increase awareness of health literacy issues, and ability to respond.

Ms Spiller provided the Council on update on the Health Complaints Guide including how this guide will address mental health related complaints.

Responding to complaints about public mental health services, Executive Director, Mental Health Justice Health Alcohol and Drugs Service, Canberra Health Services -

Karen Grace presented on managing and responding to consumer feedback. An overview of the feedback processes and themes emerging with public mental health services was provided including through consumer meetings as well as written feedback and complaints processes. Feedback largely relates to three key areas including access to services, conduct of staff and communication.

Ms Grace spoke of the importance of using feedback as an opportunity to improve services and that they register commitments made in response letters and follow through with actions as well as keeping track of, and responding to, themes that emerge.

Managing complaints about mental health services, ACT Health Services Commissioner

Health Services Commissioner, Ms Karen Toohey, spoke on resolving complaints about mental health services including public and private services. Ms Toohey noted that they receive around 600 health service complaints annually with two out of three of these relating to individual practitioners. They seek to try to resolve the issue quickly and informally where that is possible but will progress to investigations of individual complaints. They also undertake investigations of systemic issues that arise through complaints or from referrals from other agencies.

Ms Toohey spoke about addressing complaints related to children and young people and how to make the process more accessible for young people.

The following recommendations were made by the Council based for the Government to consider in relation to mental health and wellbeing:

Recommendation 1: The complaints process

- It noted that the generally the complaints processes are operating well in the ACT and that there is a good working relationship between the Health Services Commissioner and MHJHADS which is a critically important relationship.
- The Council noted that the current range of complaints processes do not address why there are some consumers that still find it difficult to make a complaint. There is still a perception from consumers that the system is approaching complaints from a defensive position rather than embracing complains and feedback as a tool for improvement.
- There are gaps in the system around complaints which warrants further consideration.

Recommendation 2: Your Experience of Care Survey

- The MHAC noted that the ACT is not utilising the Your Experience of Care Survey or the Carer Experience of Care through which all mental health consumers can rate their experience of care. It is noted this tool has not been used as fully in the ACT as it is in some other states.

Using these tools would enable mental health service providers and ACT Health at system wide level to gather and respond to consumer feedback as part of a continuous improvement approach.

Recommendation 3: Involving young people and children in complaints and feedback processes

- There is a need to further engage young people and children in complaints and feedback processes. This would include proactive approaches to seeking their feedback as well as supporting them through the complaints processes.

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