

# ACT Mental Health Advisory Council

## Public Communique – Extraordinary Meeting

16 April 2020

The Minister for Mental Health requested that the Mental Health Advisory Council convene an extraordinary meeting on 16 April 2020. The meeting was chaired by Sue-Ann Polden. The focus of the meeting was the emerging issues as a result of COVID-19.

### **The Council were advised that the following should be considered to continue to support the mental health needs of the ACT community:**

- Further advice and guidance on what is classed as an essential service.
- Further information on sharing information through online sources / technology that meet privacy guidelines would be useful for the private practice sector.
- Ensuring the ongoing delivery of supports for vulnerable people.
- Promoting need to continue to maintain health and seek treatment for ongoing physical and mental health conditions.
- More positive mental health messaging.

### **The following groups and communities were identified as requiring specific consideration:**

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Telehealth is not always access or appropriate and many people do not want to access mainstream services online. Access to technology can be limited and this impacts across many areas of wellbeing. There is potentially a higher risk for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with long term chronic health conditions.

- Older People

Personal care providers have not been able to provide the same level of services to older people in their own home. Limitations to physical and social contact may have significant impact on wellbeing. There has been some increased use of technology to maintain social contact but this not accessible for all older people.

- People with existing mental illness

People with mental illness and psychosocial disability may be vulnerable particularly if they are not comfortable with telehealth services and/or need ongoing support to maintain tasks of daily life. There may be increased demand on carers.

- Refugee community

It was noted that there are some significant issues for people from this group. Many people have lost work and they are not eligible for Centrelink financial or Medicare services.

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

- The MHAC members considered misinformation and felt that this was a concern. There is a need to provide accurate, accessible information.
- Support for people who have lost their jobs including consideration of mental health impacts.
- Upskilling and support for staff who are working in clinical and other essential services across the mental health sector.
- Consideration of the role and benefits of the peer workforce in addressing gaps in service provision.
- Developing a positive mental health campaign across the community.
- Approaches to empower the community to provide mutual support.

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