

ACT Mental Health Advisory Council

Public Communique – Meeting of 17 June 2020

The Mental Health Advisory Council (the Council) convened on 16 April 2020. The meeting was chaired by Sue-Ann Polden and the focus of the meeting was to address the mental health impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. The Council welcomed officers from the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing (OMHW) and Mental Health Policy and Strategy Branch (MHPS Branch) from the ACT Health Directorate to present on this topic.

Flattening the Mental Health Curve

The Council were advised on the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of our community was highlighted in this presentation from the Office. The presentation identified the need to maintain mental health through promotion of the known preventative factors such as healthy lifestyle and economic support and to increase the capacity of the mental health service system. The Council noted the importance of the following activities in response to the need to reduce negative mental health impacts.

- Access to data to understand the demand and current patterns of service delivery.
- Proactive outreach to people with psychosocial disability who are not engaged or have disengaged.
- Increase media coverage about access to supports to correct the misinformation about services not being available.
- Presenting information on the impact of excessive exposure to negative media.
- Balancing getting important messages out while not focusing on negatives.

Mental Health Support Package

The progress of the roll out of the Mental Health Support Package was presented by the ACT Health Directorate. It was noted that funding has been directly allocated where it could be whilst other initiatives such as the Safe Haven Café require development. The funding grants for innovation will have an application process.

The Council noted the importance of these initiatives and in particular the early intervention approaches. They identified the need to keep in close contact with the non-government organisations to understand what is happening in the community.

It was agreed there is an opportunity to build a new normal and retain the positive aspects of service delivery. There would be strong merit in considering opportunities for choice including retaining access to telehealth into the future.

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