

ACT Mental Health Advisory Council

Public Communique - Meeting 27

A special joint meeting was held between the Mental Health Advisory Council (MHAC) and the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) on 12 May 2022 to discuss the mental health and wellbeing needs of older Canberran's. The meeting was chaired jointly by Sue-Ann Polden, Chair of MHAC and Prue Power, Chair of the MACA.

The Councils welcomed presenters from Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing and Office for Seniors and Veterans to brief both councils on available data and known issues relating to older persons mental health and wellbeing and provide updates on the Re-envisioning Older Person's Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT Strategy 2022-2026 and the Second Progress Report on Age-Friendly City Plan.

Both Councils were also provided a briefing by guest presenters Jody Alexander, Senior Team Leader and Caroline Lansley, Social Worker, Older Person's Mental Health Community Team on the Older Person's Mental Health Services OPMHS Model of Care Review.

Both Councils considered the presentations and information provided and recommended the following towards advancing the mental health and wellbeing outcomes of older Canberrans:

1. The right services at the right time – there is a need to improve accessibility and availability of mental healthcare services for older people. The current pressures on cost-of-living and the cost of private mental health services will exacerbate existing barriers for older people to access mental health care. The Councils emphasised the importance and intersections of broader community services, such as housing and transport in contributing to mental health outcomes. They suggested that there would be value in community hubs that co-locate diverse services and provide focal points for support for older people.
2. Social connection and a sense of community – there is need for the ACT Government, in partnership with the community, to design ways for older people to reconnect and gather safely to reduce pandemic-related isolation. The role of the arts in older people's mental health, wellbeing and community connection should also be promoted and prioritised. Investigation and investment in community hubs as places for belonging, connection and service access is also pertinent here.
3. Mental health workforce planning – there are shortages in the mental health workforce and the need for workforce planning with an older person's lens. The Councils noting the development of the ACT Mental Health Workforce Strategy and their interest in providing input.
4. Measure it to manage it – the need for specific age-disaggregated data across a range of mental health services and issues to inform services and supports for older people.



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