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Victorian Government Department of Health

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New Mental Health and Wellbeing Act (Vic) Submission in response to the Engagement Paper

Introduction

Research Australia welcomes the opportunity to make this submission. We are the national peak body for Australian health and medical research, representing the entire health and medical research pipeline, from the laboratory to patient and the marketplace. Research Australia works to position Australian health and medical research as a significant driver of a healthy population and a healthy economy.

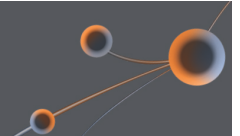
Our submission addresses questions 2 and 8 in the Engagement Paper.

Question 2: How do you think the proposals about objectives and principles could be improved?

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System has recognised the importance of research and evidence-based practise to the delivery of better quality care, treatment and support for people living with mental illness.

'The system will continue to evolve and respond to the expectations of people living with mental illness or psychological distress, families, carers and supporters. Innovation in treatment, care and support will be promoted through a dedicated mental health and wellbeing innovation fund, and services will be helped to implement and test new approaches. There will be a strong focus on translational research (testing and applying new treatments and models of care in service delivery environments) that is led and co-produced with people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress. Evaluation will be widespread, and providers of all new mental health and wellbeing programs will need to agree to evaluation as part of funding arrangements.'¹

¹ Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, Final Report, Summary and Recommendations, page 30



The Commission's primary recommendation in relation to the better use of research and evidence is encapsulated in the proposed Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing (Collaborative Centre), to:

- a. facilitate translational research throughout the mental health and wellbeing system, including in collaboration with other research centres and institutes;
- b. ensure new research aligns with initial reform priorities identified by the Royal Commission;
- c. strengthen and support a formal network of academic service leaders responsible for sharing and applying research in service settings;
- d. ensure that evidence informs workforce education and training, and promotes cultures of inquiry, innovation and learning;
- e. provide a 'clearing house' to collect, combine and share information from research, innovation projects and evaluations; and
- f. provide authoritative advice on evidence-informed approaches to treatment, care and support to inform policy development, planning and investment.

Research Australia acknowledges that the Collaborative Centre is to be created under separate legislation and not the proposed new Health and Wellbeing Act (the new Act) which is the subject of the current consultation. Nonetheless we believe that if:

- innovation,
- translational research co-designed with people with lived experience, and
- evaluation

are to become integral components of Victoria's new health system, evolving as the Royal Commission intends, these elements must be explicitly incorporated in the new Act.

In particular, the new Act should facilitate the adoption of evidence-based practice, including that generated by the Collaborative Centre, in Victoria's mental health service. Research Australia submits that the inclusion of these elements in the new Act will complement the creation of the Collaborative Centre and help ensure its integration with the Victorian Mental Health System.

Additional items for Objective 1

Research Australia recommends additional dot points be added under the proposed Objective 1:

- New treatments and services are evaluated for their relative clinical and cost effectiveness and user acceptability, and where found to be more efficacious than existing treatments, are made available rapidly to all people who could benefit;
- Existing treatments and services are evaluated for their relative clinical and cost effectiveness and user acceptability, and discontinued swiftly (and replaced) where they are proven to be less efficacious than alternative treatments;
- Promoting the importance of research to achieving the best possible mental health and wellbeing;
- Supporting people with lived experience, their families and carers, and the mental health workforce to co-design and participate in research;

An additional Principle

There are 13 proposed Principles outlined in the Engagement paper.

Research Australia proposes an additional Principle be added, emphasising the importance of ensuring that the treatments and care provided, are evidence based:

- recognise that people receiving mental health and wellbeing services are entitled to effective, evidence-based care that is suitable for the individual.

Question 8: How do you think the proposals about information collection, use and sharing could be improved?

Research Australia notes the intention that the new Act ‘will keep and build on information collection, use and sharing provisions in the current Mental Health Act as well as making them simpler and clearer.’ The existing provisions include the Secretary’s power to collect, compile and analyse data about the provision of mental health services for several purposes including evaluation of services and research into mental illness, mental health and related fields.²

The new Act proposes providing the Secretary with the power ‘to establish new information-sharing systems and authorise people and entities to use them. The new Act will not set out the detailed design of these new systems. This will be determined in a separate process from developing the new Act, in collaboration with interested stakeholders.’

Research Australia supports this approach and submits the new powers to establish information sharing systems and authorise people and entities to use them should include powers to establish new information sharing systems for research. This should encompass research conducted through, and by, the new Collaborative Centre as well as research conducted outside the Centre.

The recently developed Data Availability and Transparency Bill, currently before the Australian Parliament, provides a model for the kinds of arrangements that can be put in place to share information and authorise persons for research purposes.³ This can help ensure information is shared securely, in the public interest, and with appropriate privacy protections.

Research Australia believes that including powers to establish information sharing systems for research will support the work of the Collaborative Centre and the adoption of evidence-

² Mental Health Act 2014 (Vic), section 118

³ Data Availability and Transparency Bill 2020, introduced to the House of Representatives on 9 December 2020, available at

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_LEGislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r6649

based practice. This, in turn, will lead to better outcomes for people with lived experience, their families and carers; the mental health workforce; the mental health system; and the Victorian community.

Conclusion

Research Australia congratulates the Victorian Government on its determination to improve mental health services for Victorians and its commitment to implement all the recommendations of the report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

The Engagement paper is evidence of this commitment and we look forward to the further development of the new Mental Health Act as the essential legal framework for this work.

We believe research and its implementation will be essential to delivering the Government's goal of a better mental health system and our proposals are intended to ensure this vital endeavour is supported by the new Act.

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