Summary of the Mental Health Month Roundtable hosted by the Mental Health Coalition of South Australia (MHCSA)

Background

The Mental Health Coalition of South Australia (MHCSA) is the peak body for the non-government mental health sector in South Australia. MHCSA's mission is to influence the development, range and responsiveness of mental health services to support people affected by mental illness.

In 2023, MHCSA called for the release of the 'Unmet Needs Study,' a Report commissioned by the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist to determine the level of shortfall and investment required in non-government delivered psychosocial services in South Australia to inform service planning.

The Report identifies that there are 19,000 South Australians living with acute and severe mental illness who are not receiving the psychosocial support services they need. This equates to 3 in every 4 people in the community who are not accessing this type of support who need it, and demonstrates a substantial increase from the Productivity Commission's estimate of 11,000 South Australians in 2020. MHCSA recognise the importance of an immediate response to ensure the level of unmet psychosocial support need does not continue to increase each year.

About the Roundtable

MHCSA hosted a Mental Health Month Roundtable on 25 October 2023, bringing together sector representatives to rethink mental health care support, discuss investments in mental health care and address the identified increase in the number of South Australians living with acute and severe mental illness going without the psychosocial support they need. More than 80 representatives attended the Roundtable, with representation from key individuals and organisations across the sector, including Members of Parliament, the Government and Non-Government Mental Health sectors, associations and peak bodies, SA emergency services, lived experience representatives and people working in lives experience designated roles.

The Roundtable focused on South Australia's 2023 theme for Mental Health Month - 'Have the Conversation.' Together, sector representatives had the conversation and shared their perspective on meeting the unmet need for adequate psychosocial support services, and how the sector is best placed to respond through service models and strategies that connect people with the services they need. This Mental Health Month event built on findings from previous consultations with the sector to focus on the development of potential solutions and strategies.

What we heard from participants

Service models

Roundtable participants shared their perspective on the kinds of service models that need to be prioritised to respond to the unmet need for psychosocial support. A range of common service model features were suggested and included:

- a focus on early intervention to reduce the need for more intensive support
- easy to navigate and coordinated services that are accessible through the provision of outreach and after-hours support
- non-clinical models that are recovery focused and provide holistic support to address the factors that contribute to mental health and psychosocial wellbeing
- are lived experience led at all levels, from service design and delivery through to leadership and governance
- place-based and community building approaches that leverage local assets and integrate available resources and funding streams
- safe, flexible and inclusive models that are person-centred to ensure individuals have access to the support they need, when they need it
- open referral pathways and the availability of interim support.

Discussions consistently highlighted the need to tailor service models for priority population groups and address the mental health stigma experienced within communities. Roundtable participants also highlighted the need for systemic change to ensure consumer needs drive funding models and the support provided to individuals — rather than support being informed by service eligibility criteria and medicalised models of care.

Service model considerations

Sector representatives discussed the necessary elements of service design in responding to the unmet need for psychosocial support. The first element focused on creating pathways to connect people with the right support, with solutions focused on creating pathways that are clear to the sector, connected with community services and which do not rely on the need for a referral generated by the Community Mental Health Team.

Integration between services was the second service design element explored. A consistent theme raised by participants was the need for integration to be led by government agencies in order to facilitate and support improved sector-level integration, due to existing upstream silos influencing funding agreements, creating competition and reducing genuine collaboration between services. Opportunities for collaboration at a service level primarily focused on developing joint, multidisciplinary models of care and place based approaches that bring together a broad range of services and supports, as well as supporting shared accountability through formalised collaboration mechanisms (e.g. service agreements, case conferencing, alliance models).

The third service design element focused on workforce capacity and capability. Discussions identified the need for a workforce comprising both paid and volunteer roles and representation of both lived and learned experience. Opportunities for training and development centred on workforce supervision and training to support the provision of person-centred and trauma informed care. The need for specific workforce strategies to increase workforce capacity and capability in Country South Australia were also identified, with suggested strategies ranging from professional development and support activities (e.g. mentoring and networking) through to accommodation incentives.

The final element discussed by participants was 'measuring the right outcomes and impacts.' A key theme to emerge was the need for measures that are collected from the outset, capture a mix of qualitative and quantitative data and are targeted to individual need rather than clinical measures or service activity. Communicating the impact of psychosocial services was raised as particularly important to demonstrate their over the short and longer term and to inform continuous quality improvement activities.

Partnerships and collaboration

Sector representatives discussed the greatest opportunities for more partnerships and collaboration and generated ideas around how this should happen to support participation by and benefit for stakeholders.

A key theme to emerge was the need for opportunities and communication platforms that bring together stakeholders within and across relevant sectors to learn, discuss current challenges and collaboratively develop solutions, connect and network. Examples included interagency meetings, collaboratives, alliance models, and joint workforce training.

Although the sector was described as generally being collaborative, the need to address restrictions created through existing funding and contracting mechanisms (e.g. restricted referral pathways) was highlighted as important to enhance collaboration at the service level.

Next steps

Findings from the Mental Health Month Roundtable will be used in our ongoing work with stakeholders and to inform MHCSA's submission in the lead up the State Government's 2024 Budget, calling on Government to meet the unmet need for community based mental health support.

Thank you to all who participated and shared their valuable contributions to this important event. We look forward to keeping you updated as we work together to respond to the unmet need for psychosocial support in South Australia.

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