

# Mental Health: Exploring Collaborative Community Reform in South Australia

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## Executive summary & recommendations

This project, 'Mental Health: Exploring Collaborative Community Reform in South Australia' involved working collaboratively with a range of sector stakeholders, consumers and carers to identify and explore the priorities for mental health reform in South Australia, focusing on opportunities and barriers in the provision of cross-sectoral service integration. The value of sustainable accommodation combined with appropriate support during the recovery journey for people living with mental illness was also explored in this research. The project explored two questions which built upon each other. These research questions were:

1. What are the community mental health and related community sector priorities for mental health reform?
2. To what extent does sustainable and high quality accommodation combined with appropriate supports contribute to the recovery journey?

One-to-one interviews were conducted with identified stakeholders related to the government and the community mental health sectors. Two focus group sessions were also held to explore consumer and carer experiences and priorities for reform from a lived experience perspective.

This research provides a consolidated account of the experiences of those that use the mental health system and work within the field. It identifies a core set of themes which continue to affect the implementation of a collaborative, integrated mental health system. Findings included that the system is fragmented and unbalanced, that it is focused on clinical approaches, and that it is a risk averse sector with a negative workforce culture issues, ongoing discrimination and stigmatisation, ineffective funding models and a lack of appropriate measures, indicators and targets. Participants advocated for a stepped, collaborative, person-centred system, with the consumer and carer voices being the most

important elements in any future reform, and were eager to engage in the work needed to achieve this goal.

The recommendations from the findings drawn from the analysis of the data gathered for this report are as follows:

**Recommendation 1: Refocus on the effective implementation of a stepped system of care, rebalancing roles and resources within the mental health sector to best serve consumers at their level of need.**

To implement this recommendation it is suggested that:

- the system be refocused on early intervention, prevention and community-based supports through the development of a strategic long-term plan to increase collaboration and integration within the South Australian mental health sector;
- emphasis be placed on effective implementation of a graduated stepped model, and particularly on community-based and subacute options such as Intermediate Care Centres (ICCs), crisis respite, and intensive home-based support;
- the acute and community-managed mental health sectors continue to improve collaborative partnerships;
- reform places consumer recovery goals and needs at the core of the sector and focuses on offering people access to the support they need when they need it via a flexible, open door system that allows entry and exit at various steps, rather than via an acute episode.

**Recommendation 2: Facilitate an integrated system. This system must be designed to effectively connect federal and state mental health funding and services, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Primary Health Networks (PHN), a well-resourced community-managed sector, consumers and carers.**

To implement this recommendation it is suggested that:

- the State Government ensures that the South Australian Mental Health Commission has the independence and authority to seek information and provide recommendations, and has the requisite resources to implement reform;
- the South Australian Mental Health Commission engages a governance structure that places representation from the community and acute mental health sectors alongside representation from consumers and carers;
- the governance structure of the South Australian Mental Health Commission ensures that the voices of all mental health sector stakeholders are equally valued and that their input and expertise is reflected in policy and reform;
- the South Australian Mental Health Commission facilitates the development of a State Charter that articulates a shared vision for integrated, recovery-oriented and consumer focused reform, endorsed by all interested parties;
- the South Australian Mental Health Commission works with consumers and carers, SA Health, the community managed sector, the NDIA and the PHNs, to inform, develop and implement an effective mental health ecosystem in South Australia that engages with broader sector reform and national policy.

**Recommendation 3: Develop outcomes and indicators that facilitate consumer-centred and recovery-oriented service delivery and collaborative approaches.**

To implement this recommendation it is suggested that:

- the South Australian Mental Health Commission undertakes a review of the current outcomes, targets and measurements used within the South Australian mental health sector;
- new evidence-based measures and outcomes are developed that holistically reflect consumers' individual and unique recovery journeys alongside their clinical outcomes and symptoms;
- the South Australian mental health sector commit to these outcomes via a Charter facilitated by the South Australian Mental Health Commission;
- outcomes facilitate the ongoing development of partnerships between the community and acute mental health sectors;
- outcomes reflect and develop a commitment to whole of person approaches via cross-sector partnerships that support people in managing a range of social health needs;
- the State Government allocates funding based on these outcomes and prioritises resources for effective models of community-based support.

**Recommendation 4: Invest in training and facilitate the development of cross-sector knowledge and networks to challenge the stigma attached to mental illness by the workforce.**

**Recommendation 5: Invest in engagement with, and development of, the lived experience workforce.**

To implement these recommendations it is suggested that:

- the mental health sector continues to support and implement the upskilling, support and development of a qualified and appropriately remunerated workforce;
- stronger cross-sector networks are developed through collaborative services and training;
- commitment is made to investing in appropriate training and ongoing supervision for employees to challenge stigma and discrimination, facilitate respectful consumer centred approaches, and educate the workforce about the important contribution, unique skill and expertise that lived experience and peer workers make to consumer recovery journeys;
- the unique expertise and skills of the lived experience workforce are recognised in recruitment and remuneration policies and through the provision of resources to ensure ongoing support and development opportunities;
- the peer worker role is expanded, allowing consumers access to peer workers at every level of support in a stepped system of care;
- the development of the peer workforce is facilitated via subsidised training and the infrastructure and resources needed to provide ongoing support and training.

**Recommendation 6: Develop stronger avenues through which the voices of consumers and carers can be heard, and place these at the centre of policy and service development.**

To implement this recommendation it is suggested that:

- system reforms are undertaken via a process of co-design, in partnership with consumers and carers;
- consumers and carers are engaged in an expert role as part of the governance structure of the South Australian Mental Health Commission and within SA Health;
- the use of consumer and carer participation is standard practice in governance, development, evaluation and tendering with regards to programmes and services in the mental health sector;
- expert knowledge and input from mental health consumers and carers is sought across sectors to ensure representation of the consumer voice in all social health issues that factor into an individual's mental wellbeing;
- appropriate remuneration is provided to consumers and carers in recognition of their contribution in consultation or advisory roles;
- investment is made into implementing consumer- and carer-centred policies and training across the South Australian mental health sector to ensure the integration of consumer and carer input is respected and supported;
- investment is made to ensure that consumers and carers engaged in expert advisory or consultation roles have access to ongoing support, peer supervision and development opportunities to enhance their skills and contributions to policy and practice.