

29 November 2017

Professor Tarun Weeramanthri
Chief Health Officer
Department of Health, Western Australia

By email to: publichealthact@health.wa.gov.au

Dear Professor Weeramanthri

Re: First Interim State Public Health Plan

The Western Australia Branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP WA Branch) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Western Australian Government's First Interim State Public Health Plan (the Plan) consultation.

The RANZCP is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises governments on mental health care. The RANZCP is the peak body representing psychiatrists in Australia and New Zealand. The RANZCP WA Branch represents over 450 members, more than 340 of whom are qualified psychiatrists.

In responding to the Plan, the RANZCP WA Branch would like to commend the Chief Health Officer and the Public Health Division on their integration of public health initiatives and planning considerations for state and local governments.

While acknowledging the challenge of maintaining a workable scope, the RANZCP WA Branch believes the Plan should be inclusive of mental health for a number of reasons, including that:

- the plan represents an invaluable opportunity to integrate mental health into community-based health planning
- mental illness and drug dependencies are a significant burden of disease in Western Australia
- people with mental illness and/or alcohol and other drugs issues are at high risk of poorer physical health outcomes, with physical illness co-morbidities and risk factors being the rule rather than exception (RANZCP, 2015)
- there is potential for reducing stigma around mental illness through acknowledgement that, as for physical health, there are positive strategies that individuals and communities can use to improve their mental health.

Suggestions for additional objectives and policy priorities

The Plan's objective 'Enabling and empowering people to make healthy lifestyle choices' should include mental health strategies such as:

- Planning for accessible locations for mental health, alcohol and other drugs services within local government areas. Stigma and discrimination against consumers of mental health, alcohol and other drugs services are barriers to the development of services and programs in accessible locations.
- Reducing social isolation through fostering community connections. This could include provision of services such as seniors and childcare centres, supporting local community groups and activities, and taking an active role in planning for the inclusion of those who may be marginalised or home bound such as new parents, seniors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the LGBTIQ community and people with disability.
- Engaging in mental health promotion programs such as 'Act-Belong-Commit', 'Alcohol. Think Again', and 'Drug Aware' and building the capacity of communities to protect vulnerable people.

The Mental Health Commission's [Suicide Prevention 2020: Together we can save lives](#) acknowledges that universal, evidence-based training programs are key to skilling the community in how to deal with suicide risk and behaviour effectively. Suicide prevention and post-vention strategies could be usefully embedded in the priorities for the objective 'providing health protection for the community'.

In order that our state has an integrated, whole of community approach to mental health and wellbeing the RANZCP WA Branch therefore recommends:

1. The Chief Health Officer and the Department of Health (DoH) incorporate mental health considerations in any state-wide public health planning.
2. That the DoH partner with the Mental Health Commission (MHC) to integrate relevant policies including [Better Choices. Better Lives. Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015–2025](#)
3. That the RANZCP WA Branch, MHC, DoH Mental Health Unit, Western Australian Association for Mental Health, Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies, consumers, carers and other key mental health stakeholders be closely consulted with a view to revising the Public Health Plan and including both mental health data and evidence-based interventions within the purview of local governments and communities.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in the submission, please contact Zoe Carter, RANZCP WA Branch Policy Officer via zoe.carter@ranzcp.org or by phone on (08) 9347 6429.

Yours sincerely



Dr Elizabeth Moore
RANZCP, Western Australian Branch Chair

Reference

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (2015) Keeping Mind and Body Together: Improving the physical health and life expectancy of people with serious mental illness. Available at www.ranzcp.org/Files/Publications/RANZCP-Keeping-body-and-mind-together.aspx (accessed 22 November 2017).