



Submission:

The National Conversation - a National Strategy for Young Australians

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ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

This submission was developed in response to the invitation for youth organisations and individuals to contribute to the National Conversation on Development of a National Strategy for Young Australians. As a provider of key services to young people across Australia, **headspace** is well placed to comment on issues of relevance to our stakeholders. **headspace** is committed to providing opportunities for young people to express their view, recognising their key role as experts in their own lives and experiences. As a result, we promoted the range of opportunities to contribute to the National Conversation to our large group of supporters. We also developed a survey targeting the two Key Priorities for Action outlined under the Strategy of most relevance to our service users to assist us in developing our response. This survey was distributed to stakeholders electronically. When **headspace** asked young stakeholders from around Australia to complete a survey with relation to early intervention and accessing services a prompt response was received from 121 people in less than a week. Of those who completed the survey 110 were young people under the age of 25. There was good representation across the age spectrum 12 – 25 and all of the States and Territories were represented. Questions included options for comment, some of which are included here.

The following represents the position of **headspace** as a national organisation with expertise in youth health, informed by the views of many young people, half of whom have accessed a service and many others who have sought information from our website. Our comments relate specifically to three of the Prime Ministers Priorities for Action.

INTRODUCTION

headspace the National Youth Mental Health Foundation was launched in 2006, initially funded as part of the Federal Budget commitment to the Youth Mental Health Initiative. **headspace** is currently funded by the Australian Government under the Promoting Better Mental Health – Youth Mental Health Initiative.

headspace has thirty centres that provide services to young people across Australia that are located in every State and Territory and cover metropolitan, regional and rural locations. Through these centres **headspace** provides support, information and services across physical health, mental health, health, drug and alcohol and vocation assistance to young people and their families across Australia. A **headspace** Centre is a youth friendly community based provider of services to young people 12 – 25. Provided at a community level by a consortium of services addressing specific needs of young people, all **headspace** Centres have at their core a primary care practice together with allied health, drug and alcohol workers and mental health practitioners. The array of services is diverse and multidisciplinary ensuring Centres can address a wide range of concerns affecting young people. In addition, the **headspace** website provides information and support to young people, parents, carers and workers which is widely accessed. www.headspace.org.au

headspace National Office, located in North Melbourne, provides coordination, support and training to the **headspace** centres, maintains the website and ensures that youth mental health issues are prioritised as governments develop policies which impact on young people.

KEY ACTIVITIES:

- Providing young Australians with a coordinated and integrated service which addresses health and wellbeing needs and promotes early intervention
- Promoting local service reform to meet the needs of young people
- Creating awareness and educating young people about how and when to seek help
- Providing an extensive and accessible web-based resource targeting young people, but also providing resources for families, teachers and practitioners.
- Reviewing evidence and interventions to provide Australians with the most up-to-date information on youth health, reported through our website
- Giving young people a voice by providing opportunities to participate in shaping service delivery
- Training professionals in working with young people
- Ensuring that youth mental health issues are prioritised by influencing policy direction and service sector reform

Submission regarding Strategy Priority areas 6, 5 and 3.

PRIORITY 6: STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION WITH YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO PREVENT ANY PROBLEMS GETTING WORSE AND TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE GET THEIR LIVES BACK ON TRACK.

Mental health is the single biggest health issue facing young Australians and so it is essential that services can identify problems as early as possible to provide effective responses to young people at risk of mental health and related issues. The current mental health system is not well resourced to deal with young people who have mild to moderate mental health issues. This often means that young people do not obtain timely treatment or have difficulty finding a service responsive to their needs.

Delays in obtaining a service are also caused because young people are unaware of how to seek assistance. Research indicates that young people are most likely to talk to friends or family members as the first step in seeking support, who in turn may be unsure of the best support options.

When young people experience a problem it can have disabling effects on relationships, family, education and work. We know that identifying at-risk young people and encouraging them to seek help at an early stage can have a dramatic effect on the prevention of future mental health problems. Delayed or fragmented responses to a mental health issue (including substance use) can also impact negatively on future use of acute mental health services and other areas of life.

TACKLING YOUTH HEALTH THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION: THE HEADSPACE MODEL

As Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation, **headspace** is tackling the issues which impede young people's access to appropriate health services. **headspace** seeks to enable young people to seek help early through a youth friendly approach and easily accessible services. **headspace** targets all young people in the age range of 12-25 because this age range is the period during which the onset of mental health issues escalates and reaches its peak. Seventy-five percent of mental health problems have occurred by the age of 25 years. (Kessler et al 2005).

The **headspace** model offers young people the opportunity to seek assistance for a broad range of health and vocational issues through the provision of accessible information and multi-disciplinary teams. Our recent evaluation has indicated the significance of this approach, finding that while 47% of **headspace** clients reported high levels of psychological distress, the remainder had no, low or medium levels of psychological distress (Muir et al, 2009).

HEADSPACE FULLY ENDORSES THE PRIME MINISTER'S CORE PRIORITY OF STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION WITH YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO PREVENT ANY PROBLEMS GETTING WORSE AND TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE GET THEIR LIVES BACK ON TRACK.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ABOUT EARLY INTERVENTION

When asked about early intervention 98% of young people surveyed believed that early intervention was important.

67% of young people surveyed believed that early intervention services had been helpful for them or someone close to them.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: Do you think early intervention services for young people are important?

"Early intervention services are vital to ensure that mental illness and drug and alcohol issues are addressed before they become out of hand"

"It is vital that Youth Services are able to provide support early, and to help prevent things from getting out of control"

"It's important to reach young people and offer help before they reach crisis point"

"Yes it is because it would probably give them some more help to deal with things like this"

"This is important due to the lack of services that intervene currently"

ACCESSING SERVICES

Prior to the development of the **headspace** model only one out of every four young people with a mental health problem received professional help (Andrews et al 2001). The **headspace** model seeks to engage all young people and their families/carers, within a community including marginalised young people to address their unmet needs. Broadly focused, multidisciplinary services that support young people in a range of areas from general health to more specific concerns, provide a way of engaging and identifying young people at risk of mental health issues.

HEADSPACE RECOMMENDS THE PROVISION OF THE HEADSPACE SERVICE MODEL TO AREAS WHICH ARE CURRENTLY UNDER-RESOURCED TO ENSURE THAT ALL YOUNG AUSTRALIANS HAVE THE BENEFIT OF A YOUTH FRIENDLY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICE.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ABOUT ACCESSING SERVICES:

When asked about personal experience with the **headspace** model the following key elements were highlighted:

- youth friendliness
- range of services available
- accessibility of staff

In addition, the website and related help seeking materials provided by **headspace** was found to be effective.

Sixty-six percent of young people felt there were not enough services available within their area. Of particular note was the 18% who said they were not aware of particular services.

Young people highlighted the following factors to strengthen services:

- raising awareness of available services and how to access them
- development of locally relevant services through effective community partnerships
- encouraging help seeking
- creating youth friendly and accessible services
- increasing service coverage, particularly in regional and rural areas

Additional comments: What would assist in strengthening services for young people?

"Possibly more centres to help people who don't have access to one"

"More accessible, more advertising, workshops with schools"

"Promotion and awareness raising. Also trying to work on the stigma that just because you seek the information doesn't mean that you have a problem and that if you do have issues around mental health 'that's ok'. That's why there are centres such as headspace to help"

"Promotion of positive mental health and the services available. headspace is doing well with consistent media coverage and linking with other services"

"Having young and experienced staff"

PRIORITY 5: EQUIPPING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITH THE SKILLS AND PERSONAL NETWORKS THEY NEED FOR EMPLOYMENT

Nationally **headspace** provide services for young people across four core areas -

- Primary Care
- Mental Health
- Drug & Alcohol support
- Vocational assistance

The economic and social participation of young people is recognised as an essential ingredient in promoting wellbeing and reducing mental health issues. Our service users are more likely not to be engaged in work or education and to have limited contact with family members compared to others of this age group in the general population. The independent evaluation of **headspace** found that provision of mental health and physical health support to young people was a key factor in improving education and vocational outcomes (Muir et al 2009).

HEADSPACE SUPPORTS EQUIPPING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITH THE SKILLS AND PERSONAL NETWORKS THEY NEED FOR EMPLOYMENT THROUGH THE PROVISION OF AN ACCESSIBLE, SUPPORTED SERVICE WHICH CAN ASSIST YOUNG PEOPLE TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO THEIR ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND IMPROVE THEIR WELLBEING.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ABOUT ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

When asked about employment, 90% of respondents said seeking employment was a priority.

Young people highlighted two main areas that would assist in seeking employment:

1. Practical skills include-
 - Education and training
 - Career guidance
 - Interview skills
2. Mental and/or physical health support.

Additional comments: Finding jobs... do you think this is an important priority?

"Extremely important! I couldn't stress it more. I had had many experiences where I felt that there aren't services for young people regarding assistance in a wide range of issues"

"By providing these skills to young Australians- unemployment will be less likely in the future"

"As employment leads to income which leads to stability"

"It's all well and good to equip young people with the skills to gain employment, but there also need to be employment places at the other end that they can access once they have these skills. This is especially relevant to rural and remote communities"

PRIORITY 3: MOBILISING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES

headspace values the contribution of young people and works to ensure young people are respected as competent contributors to their communities. As such we seek their advice and input when evaluating our own services and developing opinions about matters which affect them, such as the National Conversation. Further, we recognise that community participation is an effective means for young people to find acceptance and improve their personal wellbeing.

HEADSPACE STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE PROVISION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

CONCLUSION

headspace commends the Australian Government for recognising the need to develop a National Strategy for Young Australians and the range of opportunities provided to young people as participants. **headspace** believes this is an important step in realising the potential of early intervention services and mental health reforms for all young Australians.

These young people present strong endorsement of the importance of providing early intervention and employment support to assist young Australians. Their willing engagement in our survey and other opportunities available through the National Conversation represents an important example of how young people can be engaged in community life when supported by an organisation who facilitates their active participation.

headspace in commending this submission to the Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to discuss its contents in more detail and hopes to engage with the Prime Minister in an ongoing national dialogue about the importance of supporting mental health reforms for all young Australians.

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