

Sector-led Advice on Models of Care for Mental Health Services for Young People

Summary of yourtown's advocacy submission 2025



What is it about?

The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care is looking for advice from the sector on the existing system of mental health services for young people aged 12 to 25 years and potential new and/or refined models of care for mental health services for young people. **yourtown's** submission responds to the early advice to government on the current landscape of mental health services.

Why is it important?

The current mental health system is not meeting the needs of children and young people. For example, families are on the waitlist for **yourtown's** Starfish program that is an early intervention and prevention service designed to support children and young people up to 18 years old in the Moreton Bay and Logan communities. In addition, mental health concerns are among the top reasons for children and young people contacting Kids Helpline. In 2024, Kids Helpline counsellors provided 133,386 responses to children and young people across Australia, 75% of these responses occurred outside of normal business hours. One-in-four contacts were about emotional wellbeing and one-in-four were about mental health.

Some of **yourtown's** key messages:

1. Youth mental healthcare models should reflect the varying needs of different cohorts of children and young people and the diverse range of services in the mental health system supporting these cohorts

The youth mental health system has a diverse range of services; however, early advice to Government has a strong focus on models that provide clinical support for young people experiencing mild to moderate mental health challenges. This approach fails to address the diverse needs of children and young people who could benefit from early intervention and are more inclined to engage with community-based interventions and peer support rather than clinical models.

2. Prevention and early intervention are crucial components of the mental health support continuum and must be included in advice to government on youth mental healthcare models and investment

Approximately half of mental disorders begin by age 14, and three-quarters by age 24. When mental health issues are identified and addressed early, it reduces stigma, normalises help-seeking, provides individuals with the capacity to manage challenges without relying on clinical support, and can significantly improve outcomes and quality of life. Prevention and early intervention can reduce the financial burden on mental healthcare systems and families.

3. The advice to Government should consider a broad range of digital mental health supports based on young people's preferences for testing services and accessing support

Digital interventions can serve as an independent approach to mental healthcare for young people. Young people engage with Kids Helpline because it is: accessible (free, confidential, and 24/7); creates a supportive environment where young people feel comfortable reaching out for help without fear of judgment or stigma; offers ongoing support where young people can connect with the same counsellor and not have to repeat their story; and provides educational resources to young people and to schools.

4. Youth mental healthcare models should include the option of family-inclusive approaches (when agreed by the young person)

Families are a critical source of support for many children and young people; however, many families may not know how to support or respond to their child when they are experiencing mental health issues. Youth mental health systems and models need to encompass a scaffolded experience journey that supports children, young people and their families and supporters along every step of the way, and also equips parents and carers with the knowledge and skills to support their children and enable them to help young people access support more efficiently.

Our face-to-face service staff observe that families with older children accessing mental health support often feel overlooked by certain youth-focused services, highlighting the contrast with our child-centred, family-inclusive approach. Mental healthcare tends to improve when children receive strong family support and therapeutic messages are consistently reinforced in a positive, stable home environment.

READ YOURTOWN'S FULL SUBMISSION

