

New South Wales Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Summary of yourtown's advocacy submission 2025



What is it about?

The NSW Government is developing a new state-wide Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy aimed at creating a more accessible, coordinated, inclusive, and sustainable mental health system. This consultation seeks input from service providers, communities, and individuals to shape a strategy that reflects the lived experiences and needs of people across NSW. **yourtown's** submission draws on extensive service delivery experience and insights from the Your Voice 2025 survey to advocate for systemic change that meets the complex realities of the lives of children, young people and families.

Why is it important?

Mental health challenges among children and young people are increasing, yet access to timely, appropriate, and culturally safe support remains inconsistent. The Strategy presents a critical opportunity to reform the system by embedding early intervention, reducing fragmentation, and ensuring services are youth-centred and community-led.

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

Young people deserve a mental health system that is characterised by accessibility, inclusivity and responsiveness to their needs, and that recognises the importance of prevention and early intervention alongside effective crisis support.

1. Embed early intervention and prevention in everyday environments

The mental health system has become disproportionately focused on crisis response, while preventive strategies and early intervention receive insufficient emphasis. Mental health education and support must be embedded in schools and communities to reduce long-term demand on acute services. Kids Helpline and My Circle are consistently reported by young people as easy to access and vital first points of contact, with 75% of NSW counselling sessions occurring outside standard hours and 55% via webchat.

2. Invest in integrated, community-led models

Services are fragmented and fail to address the interconnected needs of young people. The San Miguel program has supported young parents through therapeutic residential care, helping them stabilise mental health, secure housing, and rebuild family attachments despite systemic barriers. Services such as San Miguel demonstrate the effectiveness of wraparound support that addresses mental health alongside housing, parenting, and social needs. These models must be scaled and embedded within the public system.

3. Make services youth-centred and culturally safe

Many young people feel excluded or misunderstood by mainstream services. Young people report experiences of discrimination and stigma, and **yourtown's** initiatives like My Circle and San Miguel offer culturally attuned counselling and peer-led engagement that should be adopted more widely. It is essential that services are trauma-informed, inclusive and reflective of young people's identities and experiences, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTQIA+, culturally and linguistically diverse and neurodiverse individuals.

4. Simplify access and reduce wait times

Long waitlists, high costs, and complex referral pathways prevent early help-seeking. A "no wrong door" approach should be adopted across all sectors to ensure that wherever a young person seeks help, they receive immediate support and seamless referrals. This model is exemplified by Kids Helpline's flexible, 24/7 access.

5. Embed genuine youth voice in service design

Young people often feel unheard in decisions that affect their wellbeing. They must be actively involved in designing, delivering, and evaluating services. Their lived experience should shape policy and practice at every level. Insights from young people in NSW who participated in the Your Voice 2025 project informed **yourtown's** submission on shaping an effective mental health and wellbeing system and will continue to be used in other advocacy forums.

6. Strengthen cross-sector collaboration

Mental health is often treated in isolation and disconnected from other systems like education, housing, and justice. NSW must dismantle silos between these systems to deliver coordinated and holistic care.

READ YOURTOWN'S FULL SUBMISSION

