

Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing

Whittlesea Community Futures is seeking State Government support for accessible and coordinated mental health services for young people in the municipality.

What is happening right now?

Mental health is the single biggest health issue facing young Australians today, yet only one in four young people experiencing mental health issues receives professional help. In outer urban communities such as Whittlesea, the limited access to mental health services, stigma, prohibitive costs and lack of transport make it even more difficult for young people to receive help.ⁱ

In 2006, around one quarter (26 per cent) of all Australian young people had a mental disorder.ⁱⁱ Applying this to City of Whittlesea’s context; out of 25,336 young people aged 15-24 years in 2014, living in the City of Whittleseaⁱⁱⁱ approximately 6,590 are experiencing mental health problems. However there is evidence of higher depression rates in young people living in the urban fringe. It is estimated that in Whittlesea, only 1,400 young people are currently seeking help for mental health issues^{iv}. This means that around 80 percent or 5,190 young people aged 15-24 years who require support for mental health issues in the City of Whittlesea, do not access to mental health services. With Whittlesea’s rapid population growth, the number of 15-24 year olds most vulnerable to the early onset of mental illness is expected to jump to approximately 36,250 by 2030 (an increase of around 10,900 young people). Agencies report that young people in the established suburbs of Epping, Thomastown and Lalor are experiencing significant levels of psychological distress. A Department of Human Services study, cited by Access Economics, showed that risk factors associated with poor mental health were over-represented in the Interface Councils.ⁱ

Headspace, *the National Youth Mental Health Foundation*, was established by the Federal government. Northern Melbourne Headspace opened in 2008 with four centres, including one in the City of Whittlesea. Since then, the centres have been reduced to one located in Glenroy in the neighbouring Hume municipality. According to local agencies, this reduction in service and accessibility is compromising the health of young people in the City of Whittlesea.

Youth Mental Health Statistics

Headspace reported the following mental health statistics (2010):

- The onset of mental disorders is most likely to occur between 15 and 24 years, with one in four experiencing a mental disorder
- 75% of mental health problems emerge before the age of 25



- Up to half of substance use problems occur in teenage and early adult years
- Mental health and substance use disorders account for 60 to 70% of the burden of disease among 15 to 24 year olds
- Only one in four young people experiencing mental health problems receives professional help
- Suicide accounts for 17.8% of deaths in the 15 to 19 year age group, and 24.6% of all deaths in the 20 to 24 year age group. Suicide rates among Indigenous young men are nearly four times higher than non-Indigenous people.^{iv}

Whittlesea youth mental health statistics (for 12-17 year olds) from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Adolescent Profiles (2010):

- 15.3% of adolescents reported high levels of psychological distress compared to 12.4% across Northern Metropolitan Melbourne.
- 3.9% of adolescents surveyed in Whittlesea had an eating disorder, compared to 2.7% across the Northern Metropolitan Region.^v

The current Mental Health Services in the Area, Neami National, Mind Australia, Austin Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Melbourne Health Child and Youth Mental Health Service, are all stretched beyond capacity. Neami National has had waiting lists of well over six months in 2013 and has reported a rapid increase in referrals for young people.

How can we build a better future?

Establish coordinated youth mental health services within the City of Whittlesea so that young people have accessible local services. Services would be developed in a hub including clinical and non-clinical mental health services and practitioners collaborating in a partnership program. Medicare-funded psychologists and other health professionals would also be invited to join this partnership.

This will reduce barriers to treatment for local young people experiencing mental health issues. Exploring opportunities to establish innovative public private partnerships and integrated service delivery models will help to address the increasing demand.

With the City of Whittlesea experiencing rapid population growth now and in the future, addressing this issue as soon as possible will help to contain projected increases in demand.

How much will it cost?

Establishing co-ordinated youth mental health services in the City of Whittlesea requires an investment of an estimated \$550,000. This proposal is supported by the Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership, including:

- Whittlesea Youth Commitment (WYC)
- Headspace
- City of Whittlesea Youth Services
- Plenty Valley Community Health
- Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network (HWLLEN)
- Neami National
- Kildonan UnitingCare
- Mind Australia
- Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)
- RMIT
- Salvation Army Crossroads

These agencies bring management, administrative, research and practice expertise to the development of youth mental health service.

How does the community benefit?

Investing in the mental health of young people can deliver significant social and financial outcomes. A report by Access Economics Pty. Ltd. commissioned by the Interface Councils Group which includes nine interface municipalities, found that over a three year period this would provide a cost savings of over \$1.2 billion from health system expenditures.¹

Locating youth mental health services in the City of Whittlesea will greatly improve the access to such essential services and will lead to positive development of young people. Further, this would be a smart investment to make as it will greatly reduce the health system expenditures associated with treatments for young people. The subsequent impact will be an increase in the value of life for young people and thereby their economic contribution to the community.

What objectives does this help us achieve?

Federal Government

- National Mental Health Policy 2008
- Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-2014
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013

State Government

The State Government is currently reviewing relevant policies. The most recent policy that has been used as a guide is:

- Vulnerable Youth Framework: Positive Pathways 2010

www.whittleseacommunityfutures.org.au



City of Whittlesea Strategies

- Whittlesea Community Futures Strategic Plan 2011-2016
- City of Whittlesea Youth Plan 2030
- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017
- Connect – The municipal plan for children and young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea 2013-2018
- City of Whittlesea Council Plan 2013-2017
- City of Whittlesea ‘Shaping Our Future’ Community Plan 2030

Key Messages

- Whittlesea Community Futures is seeking State Government funding to establish an accessible coordinated youth mental health service within the municipality.
- Whittlesea has higher reported levels of psychological distress in adolescents than the rest of Northern Metropolitan Melbourne.
- Young people from the municipality have to travel to Glenroy, an area that is inaccessible by public transport, for help.
- Mental health is the single biggest health issue facing young Australians today, yet only one in four experiencing mental health issues receives professional help.
- Strengthening local youth mental health service will reduce barriers to treatment for local young people experiencing mental health issues.

ⁱ Access Economics, *Staying Connected: a cost benefit analysis of early intervention*, 2008

ⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Mental Health of Young People*, 2007, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4840.0.55.001Main%20Features42007?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4840.0.55.001&issue=2007&num=&view=>

ⁱⁱⁱ forecast.id, *City of Whittlesea Profile 2014*, <http://forecast.id.com.au/whittlesea>, accessed March 2014

^{iv} Headspace, 2010

^v Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *City of Whittlesea - Adolescent Profile*, 2010