Local Government Association of South Australia

The voice of local government.

The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health

Submission to the Productivity Commission

April 2019

Table of contents

Introduction **3**

Local Government Policy on Public Health **3**

Productivity Commission Issues Paper **4**

Terms of Reference 4

Questions raised in the Issues Paper 4

1. Should there be any changes to approach to mental illness prevention by healthcare providers? 4

2. Can you provide positive international examples of effective approaches to mental health care? 5

3. Which forms of mental health promotion are effective in improving population mental health in either the short or longer term? 6

4. What can be done to address health workforce shortages in regional and remote areas? 6

5. How could funding arrangements be reformed to better incentivise service providers to deliver good outcomes, and facilitate coordination between government agencies and across tiers of government? 7

6. In what ways are governments (at any level) seeking to improve mental health by encouraging social participation and inclusion? 7

7. What types of workplace interventions do you recommend this inquiry explore as options to facilitate more mentally healthy workplaces? 8

Summary **9**

Introduction

As the level of government closest to communities, councils deliver hundreds of facilities and services that:

- drive economic development;
- protect the environment;
- bring communities together;
- support public health and community wellbeing; and
- improve the local amenity enjoyed by all Australians.

South Australian councils manage $22 billion of public assets and have over $2 billion recurrent expenditure. They are governed by almost 700 elected members, employ 11,000 South Australians and support 11,000 volunteers.

Public health is an important part of the work which many councils do, and the role of local government in public health has many community benefits.

The LGASA supports the release of the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper of January 2019, '*The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health*' and welcomes the opportunity to make this submission.

About the LGASA

The LGASA is a peak membership body that provides leadership, support and services to member councils. Membership of the LGASA is voluntary, but all 68 of South Australia's councils are members. The value of LGASA membership has been independently verified by UHY Haines Norton as being worth around $139 million to the local government sector in 2019.

Local Government Policy on Public Health

The LGASA's policy on Public Health (October 2018) states that:

> **Local government acknowledges that protecting the health and wellbeing of its communities is a shared responsibility of all tiers of government and recognises the significant contributions that councils make in this area. Councils should contribute equitably to providing preventative and on-going health services, notwithstanding the significant responsibilities of federal and state government.**
>
> **Health Services:** Local government recognises federal and state governments have a responsibility to provide quality health care and that council's role is limited to local or regional preventative public health activities. Councils should continue to liaise with federal and state governments to maximise the benefits of community preventative health activities offered.
>
> **Resources:** Councils recognise the important statutory role that they play in delivering public health services. Under provisions of the *Public Health Act 2011 (SA),* councils shall require that they are adequately consulted on changes to the legislative framework and that federal and state governments provide adequate resources to councils to deliver local public health services.

Preventative Care: Local government recognises the requirement for federal and state governments to improve local preventative services such as immunisation and education programs through the review of current arrangements. Councils, through the LGASA, will continue to lobby federal and state governments for reviews of these services and for adequate resources.

This endorsed policy forms the basis for this LGASA submission.

Productivity Commission Issues Paper

This submission refers to the Issues Paper and makes comment where relevant to local government.

Terms of Reference

Health and wellbeing in communities is an important issue to the LGASA's member councils, and is one of the top 12 issues identified in our recent *2019-2020 State Budget Submission.* That submission seeks increased State Government investment and better partnerships in health and wellbeing, highlighting particular concerns in regional South Australia.

The LGASA recognises how common mental health disorders are, and the significant social and economic cost that this has on the community. Lack of mental health services in regional areas is a particular concern.

The approach of the Terms of Reference for the Commission emphasising how improvements in mental health can benefit both individuals and the community is appropriate. Local government exists to support the community and management of mental health would have a significant positive impact.

The broad approach of this Inquiry is useful, which is looking beyond healthcare services into how all social systems may impact upon mental health. This approach links closely with the health and wellbeing work that local government does in South Australia, which focuses on prevention.

The LGASA response to the Issues Paper focuses on councils' involvement in creating supportive environments in which local communities can prosper and enjoy improved health and wellbeing. It is evident that many things contribute to our capacity to enjoy good health. These include our individual behaviours and circumstances, availability and affordability of medical care and treatments, the communities we live in and the lifestyle choices we make. Evidence has shown that the costs of poor mental health are borne by not only the individual, but also by families, communities, industry and governments:

https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/Using-policy-to-promote-mental-health-and-wellbeing----A-guide-for-policy-makers

Questions raised in the Issues Paper

Questions in the Issues Paper which relate to matters of concern to the LGASA and our member councils have been paraphrased here.

1. Should there be any changes to approach to mental illness prevention by healthcare providers?

A 'population health approach' aims to improve the health of the entire population and to reduce health inequities among population groups and this approach is supported here. Actions to support a

population health approach need to improve the social, physical and economic environments where people live, as well as strengthen a person's understanding, skills and knowledge in ways that support and maintain their efforts to achieve and maintain mental health.

Research also suggests that population-based approaches for promoting mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental illness can be most successful if they:

- Address inequities that exclude the most socially disadvantaged or people at risk, such as indigenous people, people with mental illness, children and young people, people with disabilities, elderly people and refugees
- Use a settings-based approach such as in schools, workplaces, sports clubs, or community-based activities
- Are supported by access to good quality care and recovery-focused services for those who are experiencing poor mental health or mental illness
- Combine advocacy, communication, policy and legislation, together with community participation and evidence-building strategies
- Ensure policies and practices are multi-faceted and work across sectors including education, housing, mental health services, employment and industry, transport, arts, sports, urban planning and justice
- Utilise principles of public participation, engagement and empowerment.

A large body of work was commissioned by VicHealth in 2005/2006 which culminated in the '*Evidenced-based Mental Health Promotion Resource' Kit* by H Keleher and R Armstrong. This Kit is commended to you and can be found at:

http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~/media/programsandprojects/publications/attachments/hs591_evidence_based_info_2b.ashx

This resource:

- provided background to mental health promotion as a field of inquiry
- identified the key determinants of mental health
- presented the (then) current available evidence for mental health promotion interventions and
- provided a guide to planning and evaluating mental health promotion activities. It was useful for government and non-government agencies.

An update to this body of work, disseminated nationally, could assist all levels of government policy makers and practitioners to better understand the risk factors associated with poor mental health and provide examples of effective mental health promotion interventions.

The LGASA encourages the Productivity Commission to examine this work and incorporate it into its Report as appropriate.

2. Can you provide positive international examples of effective approaches to mental health care?

The '*Five Ways to Wellbeing'* campaign is a UK example of a population-based strategy that has been replicated in a number of ways across various countries, including Australia. The 2008 Mental Capital

and Wellbeing Project aims to analyse the most important drivers of mental capital and wellbeing to develop a long-term vision for maximising mental capital and wellbeing in the UK for the benefits of society and the individual:

https://neweconomics.org/2008/10/five-ways-to-wellbeing-the-evidence

3. Which forms of mental health promotion are effective in improving population mental health in either the short or longer term?

The '*Five Ways to Wellbeing'* approach has been adopted in Australia too and examples can be found here:

NorthWestern Mental Health, and The Royal Melbourne Hospital:
https://5waystowellbeing.org.au/

SA Health:
https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/healthy+mind/five+ways+to+wellbeing/5+ways+to+wellbeing+in+nature+campaign

The '*Act-Belong-Commit'* campaign is another example of a unique, evidence-based mental health promotion program applicable to the whole community. Created in Western Australia, it has now expanded to other states and globally. In essence, '*Act-Belong-Commit'* aims to increase individual and community wellbeing by increasing and strengthening *connections* between community members.

It can be found here:

https://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/

4. What can be done to address health workforce shortages in regional and remote areas?

A health workforce shortage in regional and remote areas is a serious issue for several of South Australia's regional councils, which have expressed their concern at the lack of medical services in their communities. In some instances, local councils have stepped into support the provision of such services, even though it is not the responsibility of local government. Part of the concern is that the care needs of the community cannot be met with only a single medical officer, as they need breaks and support. Therefore any program to increase the numbers of medical officers in regional areas is strongly supported by the LGASA and must ensure that there is more than a single medical officer provided.

The recent CSIRO Report Future of Health identifies the particular inequity in access and experience which is faced by rural and remote communities (page 8). It noted that Australians living in rural and remote areas tend to have lower life expectancy, poorer mental health outcomes and higher rates of disease and injury. The emphasis in this report away from treating patient illness to managing consumer health and wellbeing can equally be applied to mental health and could lead to better outcomes.

The opportunity for increased reliance on technology exposed by this report could support outcomes for remote and rural South Australians.

5. How could funding arrangements be reformed to better incentivise service providers to deliver good outcomes, and facilitate coordination between government agencies and across tiers of government?

Local government in South Australia (as well as other States, including Victoria and Western Australia) is required to prepare Regional Public Health Plans (in other states sometimes referred to as Health and Wellbeing Plans) with the aim of assessing the public health issues facing their communities and to develop strategies to address them.

It is widely acknowledged that many of the 'protective factors' or determinants of health for improving population mental health are within the realm of local government and therefore councils are positively impacting and promoting the mental wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Examples include:

- planning and development of community spaces and places to encourage social participation
- promoting participation in sport and recreation
- providing affordable housing
- managing and improving the physical environment to ensure it is safe, equitable and inclusive
- providing transport networks to promote active travel
- providing opportunities for social participation and connection through libraries, arts and cultural activities and
- creating local economies and increasing employment opportunities.

Underpinning the work of local government is the emphasis on equitable access and inclusion for all to the services and infrastructure that they provide or support.

Local governments are often not directly funded to provide many activities (examples outlined in the next section) which can result in smaller, regional and rural councils being unable to offer the same level of services, programs or activities than the larger metropolitan councils.

There is opportunity to consider the funding arrangements for preventative health, and to facilitate coordination between government agencies and across tiers of governments, to recognise the important work local governments do, directly and indirectly, to improve population mental health.

6. In what ways are governments (at any level) seeking to improve mental health by encouraging social participation and inclusion?

Local government in South Australia undertakes a range of activities to improve social participation and inclusion and include:

- Campaigns such as '*Harmony Day*' or '*Neighbour Day*' during the month of March.
- Sporting activities and social events at libraries (such as community cooking classes, story time for new parents, and book clubs/talks)
- Providing door-to-door community bus services for older adults who require assistance to community activities
- Funding of social support programs and activities such as Men's Sheds, free group fitness activities (such as those provided by City of Playford and City of Burnside)

- Community Garden initiatives (various councils)

These types of programs build social capital and community resilience which strengthen communities in the face of emergencies, and improve community health and wellbeing. These activities and programs achieve social outcomes which may be unrecognised by decision-makers as they are often part of core council services.

7. What types of workplace interventions do you recommend this inquiry explore as options to facilitate more mentally healthy workplaces?

Local government in South Australia employs over 11,000 people. It is a significant employer and therefore has learnings to share, as well as an example to set, in the creation of a mentally healthy workplace.

An example is provided here from The City of Marion, which is a suburban Adelaide council with a population of around 88,000. The actions outlined here are typical of other suburban councils in achieving a mentally healthy workplace:

- Access to an *Employee Wellbeing Program* (known as Employee Assistance Program) where employees have access to three visits to a psychologist. Extended visits are available depending on need.
- Making staff aware of the option of a mental health plan with a doctor, which includes ten free visits to a psychologist.
- Access to a mental health page on the organisation's intranet which is communicated to staff.
- Mental health first aid officers are available in the workplace, who of course need to be trained in this area.
- Access to a mental health session made available to staff during *Mental Health Week*.
- Having up to 12 months carers leave for any staff who need to care for a family member.
- Talking openly about mental health to remove the taboo that is commonly associated with this illness.
- An annual Wellbeing program is in place which provides monthly initiatives based on the four principles of wellbeing: Healthy Minds, Health Culture, Health Place and Healthy Body.
- 'Healthy Minds' includes Mental Health training across the leadership group plus 'mind-your-wellbeing', mental health awareness and resilience sessions for staff.
- The organisation also includes the communication of mental health topics and initiatives through its '*Think Safe Live Well'* newsletter which aims to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

There is also the ancillary issue of customer service organisations which regularly have to deal with customers with mental health issues. This would apply to all councils in South Australia, where customers come to access libraries, make payments and submit planning applications, for example. In these roles, staff need to be trained in both identifying and managing people with mental health issues and perhaps providing access to support services where applicable.

Psychosocial risks need to be considered in workplace hazard assessments. As an example, the City of Marion uses the Sky Trust system which is a confidential psychosocial incident reporting and investigation module.

Summary

The LGASA supports the Issues Paper and anticipates the report of the Productivity Commission on '*The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health'.* Mental health issues have a significant impact on the community and local government is keen to improve the way mental health is managed in South Australia. Local government is also mindful of its role as a major employer and providing leadership in managing mental health issues.

Contact:

Lea Bacon

Director Policy

Local Government Association of South Australia

Tel: 08 8224 2125

Email: lea.bacon@lga.gov.sa.au

Local Government Association of South Australia

The voice of local government.

148 Frome St
Adelaide SA 5000

GPO Box 2693
Adelaide SA 5001

T (08) 8224 2000

E lgasa@lga.sa.gov.au

www.lga.sa.gov.au