



Submission

Youth Justice Health Data Collection Feasibility Study

1. About this submission

This submission is made on behalf of Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health in response to an invitation to contribute suggestions for the National Youth Justice Health Advisory Group.

This submission supports the project to improve data collection on the health of young people under youth justice supervision, in particular data on the prevalence of mental health. A brief response is provided regarding the question:

In the absence of available funding to send researchers out to collect health-related data for young people on community based orders, what other methods can we use to most effectively collect such data?

In summary the submission:

- supports the inclusion of young people on community based orders as part of the data collection project; and
- makes suggestions on how this might be accomplished.

2. About Orygen – the National Centre for Youth Mental Health

Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. Orygen's work has created a new, more positive approach to the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, and has developed new models of care for young people with emerging disorders. This work has been translated into a worldwide shift in services and treatments to include a primary focus on getting well and staying well, and health care models that include partnership with young people and families.

Orygen is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It is a charitable entity with Deductible Gift Recipient Status and is an approved research institute. The Company has three Members: the Colonial Foundation, The University of Melbourne and Melbourne Health.

3. Measuring the mental health of young people on community based orders

Young people are at greater risk of experiencing mental ill-health and participating in offending behaviour than any other age group in the community. Data show the majority of young people (85%) were under supervision orders with 4,785 young people under community based supervision orders on an average day (in 2014-15) ¹.

A brief search for data by jurisdiction found little in the way of reported mental health data for young people serving supervision orders. There is evidence that some jurisdictions may have data or are looking at collecting relevant data.

New South Wales

The NSW Department of Justice has a juvenile justice research agenda. The fifth priority on this agenda addresses engagement and practice with young people with mental health issues. Research undertaken by the department includes ²:

- Investigating incarcerated and inpatient adolescents' beliefs and adherence to psychotropic medication

- Annual Patient Snapshot Survey
- Children's Court Mental Health Screening Project

Victoria

In Victoria data is reported on the proportion of prison entrants allocated a psychiatric risk rating at prison reception assessment. Youth justice reported data is limited to quantitative data on involvement³. The provision of counselling services to young people involved in youth justice may contain data relevant to the proposed project or provide an opportunity to include routine data collection that could be made available to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for reporting purposes.

Queensland

The Queensland Government has released data on young people commencing unsupervised youth justice orders⁴. This data is limited to Indigenous status, age groups, gender and youth justice region. A Youth Justice policy is being implemented that includes a focus on mental health support⁵. There may be data collection associated with this policy.

Western Australia

Data is reported on the gender, Indigenous status, age group and type of order for young people service community based orders⁶.

South Australia

Young people on a Youth Court order in South Australia undergo 'comprehensive assessment' to inform individual case management⁷. This assessment may include mental health data.

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Children and Young people Commissioner has attempted to estimate the prevalence of mental illness among young people in the youth justice system⁸. The attempt 'proved to be a complex task, and the available data provides only a limited and partial picture of the situation.' In 2012 and 2013 there were 434 admissions to supervised detention and 83 admission assessments. A clinical diagnosis or 'some other notation on the file' was identified for 70 percent (n=58) of assessments. The report identifies four reasons why the real figure would actually be higher.

Northern Territory

The 2011 Review of the Northern Territory Youth Justice System: Report identified a lack of mental ill-health data for young people involved in the youth justice system⁹. A recommendation for improved data collection was included in the report.

4. Opportunities for data collection

Opportunities for data collection on the mental health of young people on community supervision orders may exist or could be included:

1. as part of mental health assessments conducted by counselling services within the youth justice system;
2. in mental health assessments undertaken through court processes for young people who are subsequently given supervision orders;
3. the Annual Patient Snapshot Survey conducted in NSW could provide a model for surveying a sample of young people on community based orders;
4. any existing forensic assessments; and
5. where jurisdictions have identified improved or expanded data collection within youth justice policies, strategies et cetera the AIHW could suggest items for inclusion.

Where the opportunity to suggest items for data collection can be identified the five components of the existing National Prisoner Health Data Collection should be used as a minimum dataset.

5. Further information

For further information and follow up relating to this submission, please contact:

David Baker

Senior Policy Analyst

Email: david.baker@orygen.org.au or Mobile: 0401 44 55 29

References

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