

A GLOBAL RESPONSE TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

A SUMMARY OF WHAT'S CONTAINED IN THE FULL REPORT IN THE VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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In 2019 the World Economic Forum prioritised the need for action on mental health, and identified youth mental health and early intervention as key areas for impactful change. The Forum partnered with Orygen, a youth mental health research and clinical translation centre, to develop a Global Youth Mental Health Framework to assist low, middle and high resource settings, or countries to build systems of care to promote the mental health of young people and to respond to those with mental illness via evidence-informed approaches.

75 per cent of mental health issues begin before the age of 25. Young people are often exposed to a wide range of mental health challenges which can impact their relationships, education, work and housing opportunities. By meeting and listening to young people from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Africa and North America, three main mental health challenges were voiced. These included the pressure to do well at school, the influence of technology and social media and inaction around climate change. Many young people felt they faced greater struggle and anxiety because little was being done to address these issues.

Due to the significant impact of mental health disorders, it is important that communities provide young people with services that are supported by evidence and try to help young people before they experience mental ill-health (what is known as early intervention). Without these services, young people will face significant challenges later in life and communities will need to invest a lot of resources in supporting them. Early actions can have long-lasting positive effects on the economy. Despite this, there are limited services available for young people, even in communities with a lot of resources.

Most mental health systems are structured on a child and adolescent system that provides care up until the age of 17, followed by an adult system that cares for people aged 18 and over. This break in continuity results in care being at its weakest where it needs to be strongest and requires the young person and their family to navigate a new and often quite different system when they are least able due to

crisis or distress. Barriers to accessing appropriate care, or reluctance to engage with developmentally inappropriate services are strong contributors to a majority of young people not accessing or receiving mental health care when needed.

In response, a 'youth mental health' approach has emerged. The effectiveness of youth specific models is highlighted by the early psychosis model, which is widely used in high resource settings. A specific youth focus is appropriate because the age group 10-25 is diverse and requires developmentally and culturally appropriate methods that acknowledge the complex and evolving psychosocial issues, symptom patterns and morbidity seen in this age group. This includes services that are accessible (i.e. no or very low barriers to entry), community-based, non-judgmental and non-stigmatizing, where young people feel comfortable and have a sense of trust.

Developing a global framework for youth mental health is a blueprint for the design and creation of services that young people will use. From our meetings with young people, non government organisations (NGOs), clinicians, service providers and researchers, we have developed a global mental health framework consisting of 8 principles. These principles are:

Rapid, easy and affordable access

Youth specific care

Awareness, engagement and integration

Early intervention

Youth partnership and engagement

Family engagement and support

Continuous improvement

Prevention