

Position Paper – Older Person’s Mental Health Services Reform Project

Friday, 9 September 2022

The Issue:

The Department is concerned with the ongoing mental healthcare of older Tasmanians and addressing the recommendations of the Older Persons Mental Health Services (OPMHS) Review report. The Budget provides \$20.5 million over the next four years to further improve patient care and outcomes through Older Persons Mental Health Services.

In order for the OPMSH Reform Project to be successful, we need a commitment for sustainable, long-term, adequate funding to meet the infrastructure/accommodation recommendations outlined in the reform and invest in OPMHS to address underservicing across the State, particularly in Tasmania’s North and North West regions.

The Evidence:

- At present the Roy Fagan Centre (RFC) is currently the only service in Tasmania offering acute mental health care for older persons. As of Monday August 29, the future of this site and the service it provides is not certain as it is now for sale.
- At present physical limitations at RFC make it impossible for the required additional staff to be employed to adequately support patients/consumers.
- The OPMHS Review highlighted the need for investment in OPMHS to address underservicing across the state, and to support the increase in service demand resulting from an aging population.
- We know also that since the review was conducted this demand has been further exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and pandemic related isolation and stress on older people.ⁱ
- Isolation for older people has been associated with increases in premature death, stroke, and dementia in the older adult population.ⁱⁱ
- Older Tasmanian’s are higher risk of social isolation and loneliness than younger age groups, a fact that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and is associated with increased mortality, decreased quality of life.ⁱⁱⁱ
- According to the Loneliness and Dementia Survey 2016 people with dementia are more than twice as likely to experience high levels of loneliness than the general public and are less likely to have a confidant, therefore maintaining existing relationships is paramount in ensuring high quality care for older Tasmanians.^{iv}

Flourish Recommendations:

- We recommend a sustained adequate increase to the projects' funding in order to address the infrastructure/accommodation needs in OPMHS state-wide.
 - The budgeted \$20 million dollars over four years will not adequately address the accommodation needs of the OPMHS, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the RFC's future.
- We recommend the establishment of smaller satellite sites in the North and Northwest possible to provide a high quality OPMHS to these regions.
 - We believe that smaller sites would not only address the issue of underservicing in the regions and would also provide a service which is more accessible to vulnerable Tasmanians, providing therapeutic services in a manner which is less clinical than the RFC and the NWRH.
 - A model including smaller satellite centres around the state will allow the families and support networks of patients in regional areas to engage in the individuals care which has been shown to reduce the severity of episodes of depression, improve quality of life and reduce social impairment.^v According to a study by Hatta Santoso Ong, MBBS, actively maintaining this engagement over time will allow these benefits to continue.^{vi}
- We recommend the involvement of communities/families in regional areas in older persons mental health services to assist with workforce strains.
 - According to Ong family engagement of this kind does not merely benefit the patients, but also the family and carers. Further, studies have shown that family engagement helps to ease family burden and carer stress, as well as reducing expressed emotions in family members and carers.^{vii}
 - Reducing carer stress and episode severity by providing a service which is accessible to the community may assist with the current workforce strains.

Sector Recommendations:

Palliative Care Tasmania

Palliative Care Tasmania (PCT) supports Flourish Tasmania's call for a commitment to sustainable, long-term, adequate funding for the Older Persons Mental Health Services for the (OPMH) Reform Project.

PCT fully support all recommendations proposed by Flourish addressing;

- *the immediate uncertainty of the Roy Fagen Centre;*
- *adequate investment in infrastructure and accommodation needs;*
- *investment in OPMHS in underserviced regional areas, and in particular,*
- *support for local communities/families/carers in regional areas to assist in workforce/service gaps.*

Research shows that people who are not supported through a life limiting diagnosis, grief and bereavement experience significant deterioration in wellbeing. Post pandemic research suggests people in the moderate risk category are expected to increase from 30% to 50% and bereaved people are most likely to also be in the 20% highest risk for depression, anxiety, and poor family functioning.

This has significant implications to the health and wellbeing of the Tasmanian population including increased use of health services and reduced productivity in the workforce and community activities.

Mental Health Families and Friends Tasmania

Mental Health Families and Friends Tasmania supports Flourish Tasmania's call for a commitment to sustainability and adequate funding in the area of Older Persons Mental Health. We acknowledge that there are current reform activities in OPMHS, however we would support the recommendation that these be fast-tracked and funded appropriately.

In our role as the peak body for families and friends supporting someone with mental ill health, we receive concerns from families and friends, particularly in areas outside of southern Tasmania, around the lack of OPMH services and access to support their loved one in their region. Therefore, we particularly support the recommendation to address underservicing with regional sites providing higher levels of service and better access for supporting from families and friends.

COTA Tasmania

COTA Tasmania supports Flourish Tasmania's call for a commitment to sustainable, long-term, adequate funding. We particularly support the recommendation to address underservicing with satellite centres to provide high quality OPMHS throughout the state and nearer to where people live.

In COTA's recent H.E.A.R. community consultation on Active Ageing on behalf of the State Government, we found that a strong sense of community was one of the areas that consultation participants identified as working well. Trust and knowledge of neighbours and the community are strong influences on one's ability to age well and older participants in group discussions linked having lived in a certain area for a long time to a sense of safety.

The Premiers Economic and Social Recovery (PESRAC) findings clearly recommend a future approach that is place based and draws on the existing strengths and experiences of the local community. This, alongside more flexible funding models that provide longer term certainty are vital if we are to support Tasmanians to age well within their own communities. The communities we visited were clear that knowing and trusting the local organisations and providers of support was a key element of feeling confident and positive about their futures.

Family was central to this sense of familiarity and support, with respondents commenting that having family close by greatly added to their ability to age well to enhance their mental wellbeing.

Flourish's Commitment:

Flourish commits to working collaboratively with Government and other services and agencies to advocate strongly for the provision of a state-wide, sustainable funded therapeutic older persons mental health service.

ⁱ Webb, L. M., & Chen, C. Y. (2022). The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on older adults' mental health: Contributing factors, coping strategies, and opportunities for improvement. *International journal of geriatric psychiatry*, 37(1), 10.1002/gps.5647. <https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.5647>

ⁱⁱ Koma, W., True, S., Fuglesten Biniek, J., Cubanski, J., Orgera, K., & Garfield, R. (2020). One in four older adults report anxiety or depression amid the COVID-19 pandemic. *KFF-Medicare*. Retrieved October, 9, 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ Steptoe, A., Shankar, A., Demakakos, P., & Wardle, J. (2013). Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 110(15), 5797–5801. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1219686110>

^{iv} Dementia Australia. (2016, September 1). *Dementia Australia*. Retrieved from <https://www.dementia.org.au/sites/default/files/NATIONAL/documents/MR-dementia-awareness-month-2016.pdf>

^v Norman RMG, Malla AK, Manchanda R, et al. Social support and three-year symptom and admission outcomes for first episode psychosis. *Schizophr Res*. 2005;80:227–34.

^{vi} Ong, H. S., Fernandez, P. A., & Lim, H. K. (2021). Family engagement as part of managing patients with mental illness in primary care. *Singapore medical journal*, 62(5), 213–219. <https://doi.org/10.11622/smedj.2021057>

^{vii} Ibid.