

Youth Mental Health Project

FORMATIVE EVALUATION REPORT SUMMARY

MAY 2015

Introduction

The Formative Evaluation Report for the Youth Mental Health Project (YMHP) is the first of two significant reports planned for the evaluation of the YMHP. It draws on the individual YMHP initiative plans, reports and other documents, as well as interviews with selected officials from government agencies. It focuses largely on the design and implementation of the YMHP, providing early conclusions that will be tested further once additional research has been conducted. The report provides a snapshot of progress to date that will inform further development of the programme.

KEY POINTS

- > The YMHP is moderately comprehensive in its coverage and settings.
- > Overall, the YMHP initiatives are on track to deliver their intended outcomes and the YMHP has generally strong oversight and governance.
- > The YMHP is a new way of working across government and a greater understanding of what is expected to change is required
- > There is a need for consistent metrics for measuring outcomes.
- > Lessons are being drawn on what interventions work and how to evaluate complex systems for addressing complex problems.
- > **Recommendations** for improvement include: establishing stronger monitoring, reporting and tracking of resources; and ensuring the adequate targeting of uptake by vulnerable groups such as Māori and Pacific youth.

About the YMHP

The YMHP was established in 2012 and consists of 26 initiatives aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of young people with, or at risk of developing, mild to moderate mental health issues.

The initiatives are designed to operate in a variety of school, family, community and online settings. The individual initiatives focus on one or more overarching goals, including: promoting wellbeing; targeting and supporting those most vulnerable; and treating those who need it.

The YMHP is being implemented by four government agencies – the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education and Te Puni Kōkiri – over four years, with the expectation of demonstrating the following outcomes:

- > improved knowledge of what works to improve youth mental health
- > increased resilience among youth
- > more supportive schools, communities and health services
- > better access to appropriate information for youth and their families and whānau



- > early identification of mild to moderate mental health issues in youth
- > better access to timely and appropriate treatment and follow-up.

The initiatives were started at different times and for different reasons, and several have objectives beyond the outcomes established for the YMHP.

The evaluation

The Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu) is conducting a strategic evaluation of the overall YMHP to assess **whether, how well** and **why** the YMHP is progressing towards these outcomes. The evaluation is designed to answer five key questions:

- > To what extent is the YMHP a comprehensive and coherent programme? Are there any gaps in its coverage?
- > How well is the YMHP being implemented?
- > What is being achieved by the YMHP?
- > Does the YMHP represent value for money?
- > What do YMHP results imply for future youth mental health policies and programmes?

The YMHP is an integrated planning and decision-making model and a new way of working across government. The YMHP evaluation is generating lessons on how to evaluate complex systems when system solutions are sought to address complex social sector concerns.

The report presents the findings of the first phase of the evaluation, which focuses on the extent to which the YMHP is a comprehensive and coherent programme, and how well it has been implemented. The evaluation

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also looks at governance, process and implementation, and outcomes for different groups of youth. Given the large number of initiatives (26) across a variety of settings, with varying monitoring and

evaluation approaches in place, the evaluation is using a range of methods and data sources.

This stage of the evaluation has been informed by:

- > a research review to highlight protective factors and settings, and good-practice implementation (completed)
- > an analysis of the evaluation and monitoring reports of the YMHP initiatives (an ongoing activity throughout the evaluation)
- > a range of key informant and stakeholder interviews about the YMHP (to be followed up at future points in the course of the evaluation)
- > a value for money analysis for selected YMHP initiatives.

Key findings

The YMHP is moderately comprehensive in its coverage and settings

To be considered comprehensive and coherent, the YMHP initiatives need to deliver YMHP outcomes and meet the needs of young people. The first phase of the evaluation found that the YMHP supports all the YMHP outcomes to varying degrees. The nationwide distribution of the initiatives broadly reflects the distribution and concentrations of deprivation as measured by the New Zealand Deprivation Index.

The YMHP is comprised of initiatives that address the promotion, prevention and treatment continuum, recognising the multifaceted nature of youth mental health and the need to take an approach that is centred on the young person.

The project is moderately comprehensive in covering the settings where young people congregate and access services. The family setting is less obviously targeted than school, health service, community and online environments. The project places more emphasis on prevention as opposed to promoting treatment, which is consistent with the taskforce research underpinning the intention of the programme.



There is good governance and project management

The YMHP is governed by a cross-agency Steering Group led by the Ministry of Health. YMHP initiatives have generally been well-designed and set up with strong governance and reporting arrangements. A review of YMHP records provides some confidence that the YMHP initiatives are on track to deliver their intended benefits. There remain some implementation issues around

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ensuring that the needs of the target population are met. In particular, it is not known whether the needs of Māori and Pacific youth are being met by this project and how this is intended to happen. By collecting this information it is felt that decision

making focused on enhancing the collective impact of the package will be better supported.

Expectations must be set for new cross-government model

The YMHP is a new way of working across government. It is an integrated planning and decision making model. To understand the value of this approach, the model needs to be clearly described ie how it works in practice to achieve specific outcomes. This work will enable the YMHP to establish measures for assessing how the project is working as a new model and whether it has impacts over and above what would be achieved from a series of stand-alone initiatives.

Consistent metrics for measuring outcomes are needed

The largest five initiatives, in terms of funding, were assessed on how they have been set up and whether they operate economically, efficiently, effectively and equitably. The analysis draws largely on qualitative judgments due to limitations in the data available. A more robust analysis will be possible once issues of data availability and quality have been addressed. The analysis concluded that the YMHP initiatives have been designed and set up to deliver value, but that they have been set up quickly without consistent metrics for measuring individual initiative outcomes.

YMHP provides lessons on what works and how to evaluate complex systems

The YMHP uses a range of approaches to promote mental health among young people, operating in different settings and through different means. The results of the different initiatives will provide valuable lessons for future policies and practices. The evaluation of the YMHP is also generating lessons about how to evaluate complex systems when a systems approach is sought for addressing population-based problems and issues.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The formative evaluation identified issues relevant to the ongoing development and implementation of the YMHP. Four recommendations to address these issues are identified in the formative report and are summarised below.

Understanding programme expectations

We recommend the Steering Group review and revise its understanding of expectations from the YMHP. It is important that there is a strong basis for understanding how the different initiatives collectively contribute to the overall YMHP outcomes – the added value of being a programme can then be fully understood. This work will help the steering group develop their expectations about how the initiatives should work together as a package. It will build on developmental work done by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) on the high level intention of the project.

Monitoring mechanisms

We recommend that the YMHP agencies establish stronger monitoring and reporting mechanisms to measure progress towards achieving the intended outcomes. These mechanisms should provide baseline data prior to the start of the YMHP as well as measures of the YMHP outcomes over four years.

Funding resources

We recommend that agencies provide more comprehensive information on the initiatives and the resources required to deliver them. The information should inform how cost effectively the initiatives are being delivered, and what channels and settings should be targeted to ensure adequate uptake. Superu will advise the Steering Group on the level of financial information needed in order to adequately inform these judgments.

Cultural appropriateness - meeting the needs of Māori and Pacific youth

We recommend more emphasis on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups such as Māori and Pacific youth. The project should monitor whether the initiatives are adequately targeting, and being taken up by, Māori and Pacific youth.



Download the full report: superu.govt.nz/ymhpevaluation

For more information contact enquiries@superu.govt.nz

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Superu Level 7, 110 Featherston Street P: 04 917 7040
PO Box 2839, Wellington 6140 W: superu.govt.nz

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