



Government of Western Australia Mental Health Commission

Our ref : MHC23/40037
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Hon Peter Foster MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House
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By Email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Foster

INQUIRY INTO PAST FORCED ADOPTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Thank you for your letter dated 16 March 2023 and the invitation to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs' (the Committee) Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices (the Inquiry). I note the terms of reference for the Inquiry and the specific request for information on the Mental Health Commission's (Commission) role in historic forced adoptive practices and the Commission's experience in assisting individuals impacted.

About the Commission

The Commission was established in 2010 to lead mental health reform in Western Australia and work towards a modern effective mental health system that places the individual and their recovery at the centre of its focus. In 2015, the Commission and the Drug and Alcohol Office were amalgamated to ensure an integrated approach to the provision of mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services.

The Commission's primary function is to purchase services and provide person-centred and evidence based programs and support. This includes programs aimed at prevention and early intervention of mental health and AOD issues. The Commission also funds services relating to the treatment and support of individuals with mental health and AOD issues and is also responsible for research and policy advice to achieve whole-of-system improvements.

Commission's role in historic forced adoptive policies and practices

The Commission did not have a role in historic forced adoption practices in Western Australia. The period in which these practices and policies were in place precedes the establishment of the Commission.

Commission's role in assisting impacted individuals

The Commission does not directly assist people impacted by these practices nor does it collect information on forced adoptions from users of their services. However, a number of non-government services funded by the Commission would assist people impacted by their experiences in that system. The services include Personalised Support, Individual Advocacy, Group Activities, Counselling face-to-face, Family and Carer Support, and AOD services such as Residential Rehabilitation services. These services can be in a person's home or in the community or centre-based.

In order to provide the Committee with an example of the services available to individuals impacted by these practices, the Commission has compiled a select list of relevant services (see **Attachment**). The list includes services that assist with mental health and AOD issues arising from the grief, loss and trauma associated with forced adoptive practices. There are also services that provide assistance to family members of impacted individuals, who may be suffering mental health and AOD issues arising from intergenerational trauma or the stress associated with supporting their family members.

A full list of mental health and AOD services in Western Australia can be found on My Services online directory (<https://myservices.org.au/search>). Users of My Services can filter by service type and location to tailor a list of providers that suit their needs.

The Commonwealth Government's Department of Social Services provide the Forced Adoption Support Service to anyone affected by forced adoption. This is a free national service, provided in Western Australia by Relationships Australia.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry. I trust this information has been of assistance to the Committee. If you have any further queries, please contact Ms Natalie Hall (Assistant Director, Strategic Policy) on 6552 0600.

Yours sincerely



Lindsay Hale
A/COMMISSIONER

24 May 2023

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MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION FUNDED SERVICES

The Mental Health Commission (Commission) funds non-government services to provide mental health, alcohol and other drug services (AOD) to the Western Australian community. The following list provides a selection of the Commission funded services that available to people impacted by forced adoptive policies and practices. This includes services that address intergenerational trauma.

Youth

- Provision of the Youth Alcohol and other Drug Education and Support program via full-time Drug Education Support Service (DESS) Workers at 17 youth crisis and transitional accommodation services across the State. This includes 6 regional and 11 metropolitan services. The DESS Workers support young people aged 15 to 25 years, who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, to address their AOD issues in a safe and supportive environment. The Program is guided by person-centred, trauma informed and harm reduction principles. This includes two Aboriginal Community Controlled service providers, and several services which provide support to predominately Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
 - *For your noting – Ebenezer Aboriginal Corporation (Perth) and Youth Involvement Council (South Hedland) are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).*
- The Commission also provides funding to the Perth Inner City Youth Service and Anglicare WA for a mental health support worker, to work alongside the DESS Worker, to support residents of the youth accommodation service.

Aboriginal Group Support

- The Commission is in the final stages of awarding Grant Agreements to three ACCOs and/or Registered Aboriginal businesses for the Aboriginal Group Support Activities Pilot Program. These services aim to improve the quality of life and psychosocial function of people impacted by mental health and AOD issues via community-based social, recreational and pre-vocational activities.

ConnectGroups Grants

- The Commission funds ConnectGroups to provide two small grants programs, Pay It Forward, which is targeted to peer support groups for mental health early intervention and prevention initiatives, and Dream It Forward (DIF), which is focused on projects that support the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities.
- DIF grants have a focus on intergenerational relationships, connection to family, culture and community. It also focusses on cultural identity and healing.

Wanslea Family Services Inc.

- Wanslea provides the Children of Parents with Mental Illness (COPMI) Program throughout the Perth metropolitan region, which aims to improve the mental health outcomes for children of parents with a mental illness. Support is primarily provided to children through individualised informal counselling and mental health promotion, peer support programs and pro-social recreational activities. Wanslea utilises recovery-oriented principles and approaches which are person centred, child-focused and strengths based. Wanslea is one of a small number of organisations in Western Australia delivering programs and support services for young carers.

WA Diversion Program

- The WA Diversion Program (WADP) offers a single pathway for adult AOD court diversion referral designed to offer a more efficient adult model and a more targeted person-centred treatment response. It covers both police and court diversion, ranging from early intervention education sessions to more intensive, supervised programs. The primary aim of the WADP is to divert offenders with AOD related problems into treatment to provide an opportunity to treat and address use, addiction and related harm. It is an early intervention diversion program targeting low to moderate offenders. Eligibility criteria has been expanded from illicit substance use to include alcohol, volatile substance use and illicit use of prescription drugs. The program is also in operation in the adult Mental Health Court (Start Court) at Perth Magistrates Court.
- WADP includes the option for referral for family and significant others who are supporting people appearing in court to the Commission's Parent and Family Drug Support for call back, or referral to other community AOD services.

WA Drug Court (Adults) and Children's Drug Court

- The Drug Court is an intensive regime that addresses the needs of the most complex offenders who require medium to long term treatment and whom would otherwise be imprisoned if no Drug Court existed. It currently operates within the Perth Magistrates Court.
- Participants are referred to the Perth Adult Drug Court from the Magistrates, District and Supreme Courts and may be managed by the Perth Drug Court if required to appear in the District or Supreme Court for final sentencing.
- The Perth Children's Court also delivers a Children's Court Drug Court which aims to divert young people who are experiencing drug-related problems into intensive case management and treatment.

LINKS Children's Program

- LINKS is available for any young person (under the age of 17) appearing in the Perth Children's Court. Support provided includes mental health therapeutic treatment support, practical support with accommodation, employment and training, and AOD and physical health support.

Individualised Community Living Strategy

- The Individualised Community Living Strategy (ICLS) program is a collaborative partnership between the Commission, the Department of Health, non-government organisations, Community Housing organisations and the Department of Communities – Housing.
- The ICLS program can provide clinical and intensive psychosocial supports and services, in addition to appropriate housing for individuals to maximise their recovery and their ability to live independently in the community.

Pilot Youth Psychosocial Support Packages Program

- The Program will support young people who are living independently or in the family home and will focus on supporting them to increasingly participate in, and contribute to community, social, and economic life.
- A range of recovery orientated supports will be provided through the service, including: support to keep on top of day to day living; tenancy support (if applicable); support to navigate access to other services; and support to socialise and build a young person's confidence and experience to start or return to education or meaningful employment.
- The service is being provided by non-government organisations with experience in delivering recovery-based programs to young people experiencing mental health issues, with or without co-occurring AOD issues. Support is also available for family, carers or significant others.

Supported Accommodation

- The Commission funds non-government organisations to provide a range of supported accommodation services for people with severe and persistent mental illness.
- Residents' personal information is not provided or available to the Commission. However, it is possible that people with forced adoptions have been in residence.

Recovery College

- The Recovery College assists people with lived experience, carers and family members.
- Those who work in mental health and AOD, health and human services sector, and interested community members come together to develop skills, and share knowledge and experiences in relation to health and wellbeing.
- The Recovery College uses a person centred and recovery-based approach, focussing on the person's strengths and wellness.

Other Services

- The Commission funds a range of other services that are used by people with mental illness. Information is not collected on forced adoptions. However, given the mental health issues that arise from forced adoptions it would be expected that a number of consumers would have experienced forced adoptions. The services include Personalised Support-Other, Individual Advocacy, Group Activities, Counselling face-to-face, Family and Carer Support, and Alcohol and Other Drugs services such as Residential Rehabilitation services. These services can be in a person's home or in the community or centre based.



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Mental Health Commission**

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Dear Mr Foster

**INQUIRY INTO PAST FORCED ADOPTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES –
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

I refer to your letter dated 16 March 2023, inviting the Mental Health Commission's (the Commission) submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs' (the Committee) Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices (the Inquiry). As you are aware, the Commission provided a response to your letter on the 24 May 2023, outlining information relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference.

I am writing to provide supplementary information to the Commission's initial submission. My office confirmed that this would be acceptable in a telephone conversation with Stephen Brockway, Advisory Officer to the Standing Committee, on 21 June 2023.

Supplementary Information – Commission's role in assisting impacted individuals

The original submission highlighted that the Commission funds non-government service providers and that these services may assist individuals impacted by forced adoptive policies and practices. The submission omitted to add that the Commission also funds Health Service Providers to provide similar services to those outlined in the Commission's original submission.

I understand that the Committee invited a submission from the Department of Health (DoH) Western Australia. As the health system manager, the DoH is best placed to comment on the services provided by the Health Service Providers that may assist impacted individuals.

Thank you for accepting this supplementary information. Should you have any questions, please contact Ms Natalie Hall (Assistant Director, Strategic Policy) on 6552 0600.

Yours sincerely

Lindsay Hale
A/COMMISSIONER

30 June 2023