



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MENTAL HEALTH AND ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS GOVERNANCE

Background

An Independent Review of WA Health System Governance (Independent Review) under the *Health Services Act 2016* was tabled in Parliament on 24 October 2022. The Independent Review made 55 recommendations about key opportunities to improve governance practices and processes across the health system.

Included within the Independent Review were four recommendations on the governance of mental health and alcohol and other drugs (AOD) public systems and services.

Consistent with past reviews on the governance of mental health in WA, the Independent Review findings included that mental health and AOD governance is overly complex, fragmented, confers duplicated functions between the Mental Health Commission (MHC) and the Department of Health (Department), and lacks a system-wide focus and single point of accountability.

Recommendations 14 and 15 were aimed at addressing these findings and proposed significant changes to the governance of the WA public mental health and AOD systems, including shifting several key responsibilities from the MHC to the Department.

Recommendation 16 stated that more opportunities should be created for people with lived experience to participate in the WA health system, and recommendation 17 was that each Health Service Provider (HSP) should employ a dedicated senior mental health executive position reporting directly to the Chief Executive.

A process of consultation on all Independent Review recommendations was undertaken in late 2022. This process informed a Government decision, tabled by the Minister for Health; Mental Health (Minister) on 14 March 2023, to accept-in-principle the majority of the 55 recommendations made, including recommendations 16 and 17. However, in acknowledgment of stakeholder feedback that more thorough consideration was required, recommendations 14 and 15 were not supported as written at that time. A commitment was made to undertake a time-limited process of further consideration as to how the mental health governance issues identified in the Independent Review could be addressed.

On 14 March 2023, the Minister appointed a ministerial working group (Working Group), independently chaired by Mr Ralph Addis, CEO of Lotterywest and Healthway, to undertake consultation with key stakeholders and develop solutions to address recommendations 14 and 15. Members of the Working Group included Mr Lindsay Hale, Acting Mental Health Commissioner; Dr David Russell-Weisz, Director General of the Department of Health; Ms Amanda Pickrell, Deputy Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Dr Nathan Gibson, Chief Psychiatrist; Ms Margaret Doherty, Lived Experience representative; and Ms Maureen Lewis, Senior Executive Mental Health.

The Minister's Statement of Intent was that the Working Group should provide advice on practical options on governance reform of the public mental health system that will address the findings on mental health and AOD governance, and that will:

- i. incorporate a recovery model approach;
- ii. embed lived experience expertise in the system; and
- iii. assist in shifting the weight of resources from inpatient based care to the community.

The Working Group undertook an engagement process with key system stakeholders, including lived experience consumers, carers and family representatives; community mental health and AOD service providers; occupational and service provider peak bodies; relevant government agencies; HSPs; frontline workers; and unions.

This began with a series of targeted engagement sessions with separate cohorts and was followed by bringing all cohorts together for two half-day workshops. An additional separate workshop was held for AOD stakeholders to understand AOD-specific perspectives on governance.

The Working Group's advice

The Working Group delivered its advice to the Minister on 19 May 2023. The advice contained measures that could be implemented to address the Independent Review's findings on governance, including:

- implementing a phased, comprehensive change plan to build capacity and shared understanding across the Department and MHC to integrate lived experience perspectives and apply contemporary, recovery-oriented approaches to mental health and AOD;
- introducing new leadership structures with strengthened accountability for system performance and to drive improvement;
- establishing a Ministerial Advisory Panel consisting of non-government community service representatives and consumers, carers and family members to advise government, through the Minister;
- developing a new mental health and AOD strategy, to commence in 2025, that encapsulates whole of system priorities (AOD inclusion contingent on outcomes of further consideration of AOD governance);
- developing of a person-centred, outcomes-focused approach to system evaluation; and
- further considering best governance arrangements for AOD.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS 14 AND 15 OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW

The WA Government extends its sincere appreciation to members of the Working Group, and the Chair, Mr Ralph Addis, for dedicating time and expertise to developing solutions to governance issues identified within several reviews of mental health and AOD governance, including the Independent Review. The Government also thanks the invaluable contributions provided by the many stakeholders who participated in the intensive consultation process facilitated by the Working Group, which informed the key direction to its recommendations that governance of mental health and AOD in WA needs to ensure an integrated, diverse, recovery-oriented and community-focused system in order to better provide for the needs of the WA community.

Solutions to achieve a better system are not limited to structural matters such as which agencies fulfil which roles, but more fundamentally involve a shared culture throughout the system, involving putting consumers, carers and families first; understanding that mental health and AOD issues do not occur in isolation from physical health, relationships, or economic and occupational circumstances; and genuinely understanding that involving persons who have lived experience makes for a significantly better system.

On this basis, the Government commits to introducing a package of reforms that will improve leadership, accountability, collaboration and coordination of the WA mental health and AOD system.

Over the coming months, the Department and the MHC will work together to plan and begin implementation of the following measures that will lead to delivering better outcomes for consumers, carers and the community.

Meaningful cultural change

The MHC and Department will begin implementation of a phased change plan to build capacity and shared understanding, integrate lived experience perspectives and to apply contemporary, recovery-oriented approaches to mental health and AOD.

Progressive and accountable leadership

A new Mental Health, AOD and Wellbeing Joint Leadership Group will be established, that will replace the current Mental Health Executive Committee (MHEC) and will be tasked by the Minister to be individually and collectively be responsible for performance against strategic objectives, established in a statement of expectations.

A Ministerial Advisory Panel will be established, with membership from diverse mental health and AOD community sector leaders and Lived Experience leaders, to meet quarterly with the Minister for Mental Health.

A Lived Experience Advisory Group and a Clinical Advisory Group will be established, to provide key community perspectives directly to the Mental Health, AOD and Wellbeing Joint Leadership Group.

A Mental Health Directorate will be established within the Department to oversee development of state-wide policy in collaboration with the MHC, provide advice on mental health matters to the MHC, Minister and WA Health Executive, liaise with HSPs and other agencies to coordinate mental health projects, and facilitate engagement with, and embed lived experience in the Department.

Each HSP will embed a senior mental health executive position reporting directly to the Chief Executive.

Establishment of Lived Experience, Aboriginal and AOD leadership roles within the MHC (note: AOD role contingent on outcomes of further consideration of AOD governance).

Contemporary commissioning practice

A collaborative approach to commissioning services will be developed, whereby persons with Lived Experience, community members and professionals contribute to the commissioning process.

No changes to commissioning responsibilities of the MHC and the Department are supported at this stage.

Whole of system strategy

A new mental health and AOD strategy will be developed, to commence in 2025, that encapsulates whole of system priorities, including shifting toward more community-based services that provide earlier intervention and prevention, and diversion away from acute in-patient services.

Lived Experience expertise

More opportunities will be created for people with lived experience to be employed in the MHC and the Department's Mental Health Directorate.

Measuring real outcomes

The MHC will develop a person-centred, outcomes-focused approach to system evaluation, designed to capture whether WA's publicly funded services are delivering with positive impact on a diverse range of domains.

AOD governance for best outcomes

Further consideration on optimum governance arrangements for AOD, will be undertaken and completed by the end of 2023 (see below).

Further consideration of AOD governance arrangements

A clear conclusion on future governance for the AOD system was unable to be reached within the timeframe for consideration. It is clear that the AOD sector calls for stronger recognition of the complexities and uniqueness of AOD, in addition to recognising its

interrelationships with mental health. AOD sector representatives advocated that AOD planning, policy, commissioning and service delivery should sit within the Department. The Working Group did not disagree with the views expressed, however noted that such a move would require far more consideration to make a clear recommendation.

Prior to the end of 2023, further consideration will be undertaken with the AOD sector and relevant stakeholders to determine the future governance arrangements to provide stronger recognition and impact of AOD-specific policy and services.
