

# headspace Submission

## Murray Darling Basin Independent Analysis of Economic and Social Conditions in the Basin

### Introduction

headspace considers the report by Mr Sefton and the Independent Panel to be an outstanding analysis of the economic and social conditions prevailing in the Murray Darling Basin and a powerful blueprint for building a stronger future for the region. We wish to make four brief suggestions focused on mental health and young people aimed at further strengthening the final report.

### Headspace suggestions

#### 1. More strongly highlight the impacts of change on the mental health of people in the Basin.

The report clearly distils how a 'perfect storm' of factors – water reform, drought, technological change, population decline, consolidation of government services and more – have placed enormous pressure on Basin communities. We understand that, in engagements with the community, the impact on the mental health of people across the Basin featured prominently. However, while mental health features to some degree in the draft report, it may be useful to give it more prominence to ensure the impact on people in the Basin is fully reflected. You could do this by highlighting a mixture of global, Australia-wide and Basin specific statistics on mental health. For instance:

#### **Globally**

- The World Economic Forum found that mental ill-health accounted for 35% of the global economic burden of non-communicable diseases - more than cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

#### **In Australia**

- Almost half the population will experience a mental health condition during their lifetime, and many other Australians experience prolonged periods of significant stress.
- Each year, around four million Australians have a mental health condition, and almost six million Australians are 'at risk'.
- Each year, more than 3,000 Australians die by suicide and 600,000 Australians think about suicide.

#### **In the Murray Darling Basin (MDB)**

- headspace has 26 centres located in and around the Basin. Our data indicates mental health is a significant issue for many people in the Murray Darling region.
- In 2019, 81,928 occasions of service were delivered to 19,192 young people who attended a centre within the MDB area.
- 79.4% of young people within the MDB area report high to very high psychological distress at their first ever occasion of service.
- 74.7% of young people at centres within the MDB area experience at least some difficulty or impairment with their social, occupational or school functioning at their first occasion of service.
- 24.9% of young people who attend a headspace centre within the MDB area were not engaged in work or study in their most recent episode of care, slightly above the national figure of 24.7%. Rates are high in some locations, such as: Warwick (38%); Tamworth (35%) and Murray Bridge (34%).
- 13% of young people who attended a centre within the MDB area experienced suicidal thoughts or behaviour at some point during an episode of care.
- Young people from our priority groups are overrepresented within the MDB area (LGBTIQA+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and in particular Regional/ Remote) compared to the national centre network.

## **2. More strongly highlight the impacts of change on young people in particular.**

The report could also give more prominence to the impact of change on young people and the risks posed to their social and emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, workforce participation, and career outcomes. In sum, without a great start in life, many young people will not go on to fulfil their potential and lead the life they and their families always hoped they could lead.

This is certainly the case with the many young people who experience mental ill health. Mental ill health in adolescence and early adulthood has a significant individual, economic and social impact as this is the stage in life when young people are:

- engaged in education that will be formative in their social connections and future pathways to employment;
- experiencing major life transitions including moving between levels of education, from education to employment, and away from their families or caregivers into independent living arrangements; and
- developing and navigating new social connections and interpersonal relationships.

### **Mental Health is a Major Challenge for Young Australians**

- There are rising levels of distress among young people. Just under one-third of Australian young people (32%) are experiencing high or very high levels of psychological stress. This rate is treble the rate reported in 2007.
- Children and young people aged 10-24 years bear the major burden for the onset and impact of mental ill-health across the whole lifespan.
- For this age group, mental ill-health is the leading cause of disability, contributing 45% of the overall burden of disease.
- Half of all mental ill-health onsets before the age of 14 years, and three-quarters by 24 years.
- 26% of young Australians aged 18-24 years experience a mental health condition in any given year.
- Suicide remains the leading cause of death in people aged between 15 and 24 years.

The report could include stronger recommendations to support the engagement of young people in education and work, their career development and their mental health.

## **3. Strengthen Draft Recommendation 19 – Develop a Mental Health Plan for the Basin.**

Draft recommendation 19 states: 'Basin governments should direct resources to attract and retain frontline service providers that specialise in addressing household distress, mental health issues, and financial hardship, in Basin locations experiencing acute social or economic issues.' This would confine action on mental health to locations such as Balranald, Cohuna, Barooga (Cobram), Wakool, Finley, Deniliquin, Coonamble, Dirranbandi, Menindee, Walgett and Warren.

While headspace strongly supports targeting support in communities where it is needed the most, we suggest the recommendation be strengthened to seek more fundamental reform and support from Federal and State Governments, and to ensure the support flows to all areas across the Basin. If almost half the Australian population are experiencing mental health conditions during their lifetimes and almost 1 in 3 young people are experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress at any one time, support for mental health is critical to helping all people to thrive across the Basin. Our suggestion:

### **Suggested Recommendation 19**

- a) To ensure early progress in meeting the unmet need for mental health support, Basin governments should ask headspace to partner with young people and local communities to deliver online and telephone support services such as eheadspace and Work and Study, with support targeted to Basin locations experiencing the greatest social and economic need.
- b) To plan for the medium and longer term, the Federal Government – in collaboration with PHNs, leading mental health organisations and State and Territory Governments – should develop a Mental Health Plan for the Murray Darling Basin, including:
  - Identifying the level of need in the Murray Darling Basin;
  - Establishing an action plan and resourcing to better meet the need;
  - Prioritising support for those most in need – communities in greatest need, young people, and priority populations, notably Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## **4. headspace stands ready to continue and enhance our support for young people in the Murray Darling Basin.**

headspace has a proud history of supporting young people to achieve their best possible mental health in and around the Murray Darling Basin. headspace operates 26 centres in and around the region, and future locations are planned for a further 9 centres. We would be happy to be a contributor to any government process to strengthen support in the region, and to expand our support to young people in the Basin.

### **headspace centres in and around the Basin**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adelaide</li><li>• Albury-Wodonga</li><li>• Ballarat</li><li>• Bathurst</li><li>• Bendigo</li><li>• Berri</li><li>• Broken Hill</li><li>• Canberra</li><li>• Dubbo</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Edinburgh North</li><li>• Goulburn</li><li>• Griffith</li><li>• Horsham</li><li>• Mildura</li><li>• Murray Bridge</li><li>• Nowra</li><li>• Onkaparinga</li><li>• Orange</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Port Adelaide</li><li>• Queanbeyan</li><li>• Shepparton</li><li>• Swan Hill</li><li>• Tamworth (outposts in Armidale, Moree, Gunnedah, Narrabri).</li><li>• Toowoomba</li><li>• Wagga Wagga</li><li>• Warwick</li></ul> |
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### **Future headspace centres planned in and around the Basin**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wangaratta</li><li>• Mount Barker</li><li>• Victor Harbour</li><li>• Yass</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cowra</li><li>• Echuca</li><li>• Roma</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• South Canberra</li><li>• Whittlesea</li><li>• Lilydale</li></ul> |
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Further information on headspace services is provided overleaf.

## Services provided by headspace

headspace began in 2006 to provide tailored, holistic mental health support to 12 - 25 year olds. With a focus on early intervention, headspace works with young people to provide support at a crucial time in their lives – to help get them back on track and strengthen their ability to manage their mental health. As the national platform to support young people, headspace is highly visible and accessible, which helps encourage young people to seek help when they need it. 76% of young Australians are aware of headspace.

### 1. headspace centres

headspace centres ensure young people can access expert health workers in a safe, confidential and youth-friendly environment. Centres services are free (or low cost) and provide support for:

- **Mental health:** Clinical mental health professionals are available to provide support, treatment and management plans for a variety of mental health concerns.
- **Physical and sexual health:** Many centres have on-site GP's who provide young people with a safe, confidential and judgement-free place to seek medical advice and treatment.
- **Alcohol and other drugs:** Counsellors are available to provide information and treatment for people experiencing issues with alcohol and other drugs.
- **Work and study:** Counsellors and vocational workers are available to assist with a range of life skills, such as: managing workloads, dealing with stress, preparing job applications and career planning.

Outcomes are strong:

- Around 3 million occasions of service have been provided to more than 500,000 young people, who can get support from 112 headspace centres across the country.
- The satisfaction rate is 86 per cent.
- 68% of young people who attend 5 or 6 sessions for depression and anxiety experience a significant decrease in psychological distress and/or a significant increase in social and vocational functioning.

### 2. eheadspace

eheadspace is a national online and phone support service, staffed by experienced youth mental health professionals. It provides 12–25 year olds, and their family and friends, a safe, secure and anonymous place to talk to a professional. It caters to the many young people who feel more comfortable accessing services online or by phone. Key features include:

- **Extended hours:** Young people can access eheadspace from 9am-1am Victorian time, seven days per week.
- **Expert support:** Support is provided by highly qualified and experienced clinical mental health professionals.
- **A range of services to meet each young person's needs:** Young people can use eheadspace in a way that works for them. They can: speak one-on-one with a clinician; join a clinician-led online group chat; engage in peer discussions; or access a range of self-help content.

Young people find e-headspace helpful.

- Around 130,000 young people have registered for support through e-headspace.
- The satisfaction rate is 83%.

### 3. National Telehealth Service

- **headspace's National Telehealth Service** provides 12-25 year olds in eligible regional and rural areas access to highly-skilled psychiatrists via video consultations. These psychiatrists are experts in youth mental health and have experience working with young people from various backgrounds. The service is Bulk-Billed for eligible young people.

- **Secondary consultations:** headspace can help build the expertise of local health providers by providing access to a psychiatrist for tailored support – including case review, thematic review (e.g., treatment of anxiety disorders), clinical review or supervision. Individuals or small groups working for headspace or other registered services can access secondary consultations on a short-term or ongoing basis.

#### 4. headspace Work and Study Programs

These programs support 15-25-year-olds who are experiencing mental health challenges to plan a career, find employment or work towards further education. Programs are delivered online or over the phone to ensure that all young people, wherever they live, can take part. Importantly, programs can be integrated with headspace mental health services. The key programs are:

**The Work and Study Service**, which helps young people access rewarding and sustainable work by working with an expert Work and Study Specialist. Sessions occur via email, webchat and phone and are designed to help with:

- identifying and tailoring individual career plans.
- writing resumes, job searching, and contacting and collaborating with employers.
- planning, preparing and practising for interviews.
- navigating the employment services system and Centrelink.
- exploring suitable education options and sourcing financial support for education.
- skills to manage mental health challenges in a work or study environment.

Outcomes are strong. Over half the young people participating in The Work and Study Service report a work or study outcome.

#### **Career Mentoring Service**

headspace can also provide young people with online access to a personal career Mentor, who can help them find, secure and maintain work. Mentors are volunteers who work in a variety of fields and are matched with a young person based on their specific career interests. Young people work with a mentor for a period of six months. The monthly Mentoring sessions occur online or via the phone, making the service highly accessible. Mentors can help young people:

- develop job seeking and industry-specific skills.
- access industry specific advice around work, employer expectations and career progression.
- grow professional networks and learn how to reach out to other professionals.
- understand the recruitment process in specific industries and improve application and interview skills.
- improve professional communication skills and build their career confidence.

#### 5. headspace Schools

headspace Schools is a national workforce that supports, engages and partners with education and health sectors across Australia, to build the mental health literacy and capacity of workforces. headspace Schools involves a suite of programs including Be You, where headspace is a delivery partner.

**Be You** equips Australian early learning services and schools with the skills and strategies they need to ensure that every child, young person and staff member can achieve their best possible mental health. Be You includes an online platform – backed by a trained workforce on the ground – that assists schools and learning centres to:

- **Develop or upgrade their mental health strategies**, backed by over 70 expert Be You staff deployed across Australia, to guide the service or school through strategy development, implementation and review.
- **Empower educators to support the mental health of their students.** The main focus of Be You is to provide information, accredited professional development, advice and support to educators so that they can teach children and young people skills for good social and emotional development, work together with families, and recognise and suggest help for young people with mental health difficulties.

- **Create links to specialist services and supports.** This can include: prevention, for instance in areas such as bullying and respectful relationships; and early intervention, for instance assisting children experiencing mental health issues to access services.
- **Involve parents and carers in supporting the mental health of their children and young people.**
- **Respond when a tragedy occurs.** Expert Be You postvention staff provide immediate advice and support to a school in the event of a death, including suicide, in the school community. They support the principal on issues such as: how to talk to students and parents; how to engage the school community; conducting risk reviews to ensure the safety of others; and ensuring staff wellbeing. They prevent suicide contagion and help the school recover.
- **Support educator self-care.** Be You provides educators with tips and practical strategies to look after themselves and foster a culture of wellbeing.

Information on the full suite of headspace Schools programs is available here:

<https://headspace.org.au/schools/headspace-in-schools/>

## 6. headspace Early Psychosis

**headspace Early Psychosis** offers free and confidential holistic support for young people who are experiencing an early episode of psychosis or are at risk of developing psychosis. As part of the program, young people can access:

- Trained mental health professionals;
- Support to help them get back to study or work;
- Support with everyday life skills, e.g. shopping and travelling;
- Creative therapy e.g. art or music groups; and
- Social group activities (e.g. cooking, going to the movies) with other young people who have had similar experiences.

Young people work with a specialist case manager who develops an individual treatment plan and provides support throughout the treatment. Mobile Assessment Treatment teams also provide assessment, community outreach and support after hours. These specialists undertake initial assessments and treatment for young people and their family.

Family and friends are an integral part of the treatment team. Families receive support, information and education about psychosis. They can attend family meetings and group sessions to get support from other families with a young person experiencing psychosis. Parents and families can also access a qualified youth mental health professional in a confidential, free and secure manner through their centre or after hours, through eheadspace.

headspace Early Psychosis is available in six headspace clusters (14 centres). Where young people are not near an Early Psychosis service, headspace centres and e-headspace can help young people access the right support.