



WANADA Submission: Emerging Directions: The Crucial Issues for Change

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Ministerial Taskforce Emerging Directions Paper.

WANADA recommends the inclusion of a broader focus on preventive health, with increased focus on specifically addressing primordial and primary prevention. This is of particular relevance to appropriately address the vast majority of infant, child and adolescent mental health and associated health concerns. Protecting mental health is identified as the seventh focus area within the draft National Preventive Health Strategy, and highlights the need to boost a range of protective factors to support improved life-course mental health and wellbeing.

Infants and children, more than any other age group, are shaped and influenced by a range of social, biological and environmental factors. Their mental health and wellbeing cannot be separated from the broader context of their lives, which includes their own individual characteristics, their family, school, local neighbourhood, and community environments. Prevention and early intervention are vital elements in improving infant and child emotional and social wellbeing, and helping to prevent the development of mental illness as they journey into adolescence and adulthood¹.

A systemic approach to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children and adolescents in Western Australia must include approaches that address:

- the wider determinants of health, including environmental and social factors that promote health and encourage healthy activities (primordial prevention)
- the reduction of risk factors to prevent disorders, including family and community elements (primary prevention)
- early detection/intervention and management of ill-health of individuals, their family and community (secondary prevention)

¹ Commonwealth Department of Health, (2021) Draft National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030. Canberra: Australian Government, p.64

Terminology

WANADA recognises the audience for the Emerging Directions Paper is inclusive of multiple sectors and service types. Given the nature of the audience, **WANADA recommends** that the use of some terms is reconsidered.

- **Integration** – WANADA notes that there are several references to the term integration throughout the paper, in particular emerging direction 6. The terminology in the paper is primarily focussed on service delivery i.e. once the individual has developed a mental health concern. 'Integration' at primordial and primary prevention levels, however, is also an essential strategy consideration.
We caution, however, the use of the term 'integration' even at the individual or family service level. 'Integration' has a variety of definitions, many of which are conflicting². Multiple interpretations will impact on the ability to establish a shared direction across all stakeholders. The direction appears to reference service connectivity and coordination – we recommend that a more appropriate term is used – e.g. 'care-coordination'.
- **Misuse** - WANADA notes that there are references to alcohol and drug misuse in the paper. WANADA recommends that 'harmful alcohol and other drug use' or 'alcohol and other drug related harms' as a preferred terminology, as 'misuse' can be misinterpreted and stigmatising.
- **Supported in their own communities** – WANADA notes that there are multiple references to infants, children, adolescents and families being supported in their own communities. The term 'support' may be misinterpreted and WANADA feels it would be preferable to identify that 'support' as it is used in this paper refers to early and brief intervention – i.e. secondary prevention as opposed to boosting protective factors.

About WANADA

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) is the peak body for the specialist alcohol and other drug education, prevention, treatment and support sector in Western Australia. WANADA is an independent, membership-driven, not-for-profit association.

WANADA is driven by the passion and hard work of its member organisations, which include community alcohol and other drug counselling; therapeutic communities; residential rehabilitation; intoxication management; harm reduction; peer based; prevention; and community development services.

² Lee, N. and Allsop, S. (2020) Exploring the place of alcohol and other drug services in a successful mental health system. Melbourne: 360Edge.