



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT

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I am a female youth aged 19 based in Canberra who has suffered major mental health issues for the past 5 years. In 2015 my mum, older brother, younger sister and I moved to Canberra from NSW to move in with my step dad. I was already struggling with mental health issues before we moved and trying to find help in NSW was already hard enough. Once settled in Canberra I was diagnosed by a GP with depression and anxiety and was prescribed with medication in the hope that it would help. My mum attempted to get me in to see a psychologist but would be told that I would be put on a waiting list and it could take up to six months or more for me to see a psychologist. Due to unfortunate situations I experienced as a child (a male stalking my friends and I at the age of 10 on a train and he performed a sexual act in front of me) I will only see a female psychologist and they are usually the ones who are fully booked for months. I spoke with my GP and she was unable to find any psychologists that were taking appointments at this time. My GP suggested that we try and get me in to see a psychiatrist. We came to a dead end when we were unable to find a female psychiatrist based in Canberra who deals with youths with appointments available. It got to the point where we had to start looking for a psychiatrist outside of Canberra. Months later I was able to get an appointment to see a female psychiatrist but she happened to be based in Bowral NSW, 2 and a half hours from Canberra. At this point I was getting mentally worse and this was my only option. For the first year of seeing the psychiatrist my mum and I would have to travel to Bowral monthly to see her as my depression increased over time. To this day I still travel to Bowral as I have grown a connection and very much trust her.

It has taken 4 years since my family and I moved here to Canberra to get an appointment to see a psychologist but they are located in Goulburn, over an hour from Canberra. I attended the appointment but was unable to connect with the psychologist and felt that I needed to keep looking. You may think well you got the appointment after 4 years and if you really needed the help why not suck it up. When suffering with multiple mental health issues you want to feel comfortable with the person you will see regularly to discuss very personal information about yourself.

Two months ago my mum found out there was an opening to see a female psychologist in Belconnen and I thought I really hope I feel comfortable with her as I am starting to give up on looking for help. I was lucky enough to get an appointment 2 weeks later. Due to Covid-19 the session was over the phone but during the call I started to feel comfortable to open up to the psychologist and finally thought to myself that this could be the person for me.

Why is it that it took over 4 years for me to find the help I needed based in Canberra? I understand that I am not the only youth struggling but actions need to be taken to give every youth the opportunity to receive the help they need. Over the 4 years my depression got worse, I was diagnosed with bipolar and a mood disorder. What if I got the help I needed 4 years ago? Maybe I wouldn't have gotten to the point where I was thinking horrible thoughts and to be prescribed antipsychotics. I am not trying to blame the Canberra health system for what I have been through over the years, but if only I received help earlier on things could of possibly been different.

More time and effort from the Canberra Health system needs to be put in place to help other youths like me. All I would like to say is that help can go a long way.

