



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT

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## Tuggeranong Community Council Response to the Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT

In respond to the 'Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT', the Tuggeranong Community Council (TCC) provide this submission to address questions as raised as part of the Inquiry. The TCC submission provides information previously supplied to the TCC by young people as part of their involvement in the Tuggeranong Community Council Youth Engagement Forum held on 28 March 2019. This Forum was held to discuss 'key topics of concern for young people living in the Tuggeranong region'. The Forum used a 'World Café' approach, a creative and interactive process, where students from various high schools and colleges in the Tuggeranong Valley came together to have their say on a variety of subjects. Topics for discussion had been identified by the TCC Youth Engagement Subcommittee and included Health and Wellbeing.

The overwhelming response from young people participating in the forum was a perception that there is a lack of mental health services in Canberra and this is particularly the case in the Tuggeranong Region.

Other areas of consensus included:

- Accessibility of support in schools
  - *Young people could easily identify staff in their schools for support, however, they explained that sometimes it can be hard to engage due to the large number of students needing to access support.*
- Insufficient Public transport being a barrier to accessing Mental Health
  - *Young people explained they believe that public transport is a barrier when trying to engage in services.*
- Cutting of the Chaplain Program
  - *Young people aware that funding had been cut to the Chaplin program within the school communities and they are unaware why this is happening given the program is highly regarded by students.*
- Inadequate address to health and wellbeing issues in the curriculum and inadequate Professional Development opportunities for staff in the area of health and wellbeing
  - *Young people explained that they feel there needs to be more importance on the health and wellbeing in curriculum. Young people feel teachers and school staff need more professional development in the health and wellbeing area in order to better help students navigating a vital part of their lives.*

In relation to the questions identified in the 'Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT', there is a close correlation between areas of interest for the Inquiry and areas of consensus amongst comments made by students who attended the Forum. Refer to the attached Appendix to review the entire feedback received from students.

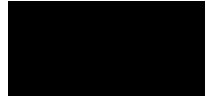
Therefore, this submission would like to draw the Committee's attention to a range of comments provided by the young people who attended the TCC Forum, where these responses relate to the specific questions identified within the Inquiry.

- I. Mental health challenges and needs of young people in the ACT across the full spectrum from mental distress to enduring psychiatric illness
  - *Cost is a barrier to accessing mental health services. Young people had knowledge of needing a mental health ‘care’ plan and struggle to find services that are free, without wait times, as they need help immediately. Young people know how much it costs to access private mental health services. Perception that free services aren’t reactive enough and they have lengthy wait times.*
  - *Getting to a service/access to transport can be a barrier in accessing services.*
- II. Ready access to mental health support and services by young people
  - *Young people felt there was a distinct lack of mental health services in Tuggeranong.*
    - *Young people want anonymous mental health advice (people want to talk about it but talking face to face can be a barrier for some).*
    - *Walk-in mental health services are missing from the Tuggeranong region.*
- III. Identifying roles and responsibilities of the family unit in supporting youth facing mental health and addiction challenges, and supporting families in carrying out these roles and responsibilities
  - This area wasn’t really explored as part of the Forum.
- IV. Prevention of early intervention of mental health and addiction strategies
  - *Social media can be positive and negative to mental health.*
  - *More support needed to strengthen the social aspects beneficial for mental wellness.*
- V. Identifying and responding to young people with mental health and addiction challenges
  - *Wellbeing staff do not always work five days a week/full-time support is needed in schools*
  - *More education needed on the effect alcohol and drug use has on the brain.*
  - *More education on the risks around sex, drugs and underage drinking. Young people are not aware about consent legislation (when asked).*
- VI. Youth suicide prevention and support for those close to someone who has taken their own life
  - *Health and wellbeing is talked about a little in some schools and a lot in others*
  - *Some young people found the presentations/workshops they did attend to be triggering (brought up issues for them that made them feel uncomfortable/caused psychological and emotional distress) and struggled as they felt they were given no warning of the content – therefore need knowledge when organising programs and outside support.*
- VII. Range of services available in ACT schools including counsellors, pastoral care workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals both in schools and within the directorate
  - *Young people could easily identify staff in their schools for support, however, they explained that sometimes it can be hard to engage due to the large number of students needing to access support*
  - *Young people explained that they feel there needs to be more importance on the health and wellbeing in curriculum.*
  - *Participants stated that they are aware that funding has been cut to the Chaplin program within the school communities and they are unaware why this is happening given the program is highly regarded by student.*

VIII. The extent and availability of mental health first aid training for teachers and learning assistance

*- Young people feel teachers and school staff need more professional development in the health and wellbeing area in order to better help students navigating a vital part of their lives*

Anecdotal feedback from young people and a range of services working with young people in the Tuggeranong region indicates distance and geographic location are barriers to accessing mental health services and support. To address these issues, the Tuggeranong Community Council would support the location of a second Headspace within the Tuggeranong region to cater for young people from across the southern region of Canberra.



Glenys Patulny  
Vice President  
Tuggeranong Community Council

## **Appendix:**

### **Excerpt from the Full Report from the 2019 Tuggeranong Community Council Youth Engagement Forum for the topic of Health and Wellbeing.**

#### **1. What do you know of the services that are available in Tuggeranong for your health and wellbeing?**

- Gugan Gulwan
- Legal Aid
- Menslink
- Presence of youth workers at Skyfire
- Schools
  - Youth workers at their school
  - School chaplains and School Youth Health Nurse.
  - Physical education in schools
  - School wellbeing teams
  - Teachers at school are aware of individuals and are safe to talk to
  - Students feel able to talk to their year advisor/year leader
  - Lake Tuggeranong College (College Life support services)
- Youth engagement teams
- Headspace
- Caseworkers in the foster care system
- Beyondblue
- Lanyon Youth Centre
- Kids Helpline
- Youth groups
- LGBT+ Groups
- Young carers groups
- Mediation services

#### **2. What service gaps do you know of?**

- Getting to a service/accessing transport can be a barrier in accessing services e.g. transport and Mental Health services.
- Cost is a barrier to being involved in sport and Mental Health services. Young people had the knowledge of needing a mental health plan and struggle to find services that are free, without the wait time, as they need of help immediately. Young people know how much it costs to access a private Mental Health service (free services aren't reactive enough and they have lengthy wait times).
- Sexual health services (none available in Tuggeranong – closest one is in the Woden area).
- Walk-in mental health services/support – missing from the Tuggeranong Region and Canberra as a whole.
- More training needed for teachers/education staff around young people and mental health.
- Lack of opportunity for young people to be involved in their wider community (for example, undertaking fundraising projects, celebrating Tuggeranong, event planning in general).
- Anonymous mental health advice (people want to talk about it but talking face to face can be a barrier for some). Young people know about the services that they can assess to gain anonymous support – Kids Help Line, Headspace, mindfulness apps.
- More education needed on the effect alcohol/drug use has on the brain (young people continued to state that teachers just tell them no with no education on the matter).
- More education on the risks around sex, drugs and underage drinking. Young people are not aware about consent legislation when asked.

- More support needed to strengthen the social aspects beneficial for mental wellness.
- No classes (in school) on sexuality (this was across the board with government and non-government).
- To access support/student services at school you have to be “really bad”, as teachers time is taken up with high needs students. Young people want it to be easier to access the support services in schools and to feel heard.
- Wellbeing staff do not always work five days a week/full-time support is needed in schools.
- Government funding being removed for chaplains, young people are aware and not happy about this. Young people state they are already feeling the impact of this funding cut.
- Things to do and spaces for young people to hang out.
- Stuck with employment – young people finding it hard to get entry level jobs.
- Feeling safe at night/feeling safe in general (increase in fights/violent behaviour in the area).

### **3. Do you think there is a stigma in talking about mental health?**

- Feeling judged by others
- Having a mental health diagnosis (e.g. depression is romanticised and “cool”)
- People turning mental health into a joke/humorous topic
- Using social media means there is constant connection and there are no breaks from bullying/negative outcomes
- Pressure on social media to get likes
- Social media can be positive and negative to mental health

### **4. Are you aware of the housing issues for young people in Tuggeranong and what do you think could be done to improve housing options for young people?**

- Not aware of housing issues – will think about it when it’s closer to wanting/need to move out.
- Would access group/share house to make living out of home more affordable.
- Accessing student loans to support with study/living expenses.
- Difficulty in managing university and housing responsibilities.
- Young people did not seem phased about lack of housing options in Canberra but instead informed about how hard it would be to break into the housing market. A lot of young people understood the reality of most likely being in a share house if they wanted to move out and study at the same time.

### **5. General comments/thoughts on health and wellbeing and suggestions for services.**

- Health and wellbeing is talked about a little in some schools and a lot in others.
- Workshops at schools on health and wellbeing topics that have students actively involved rather than passive involvement (aka “being talked at”).
- More subjects needed on health in schools.
- Services young people can access to improve physical health (like the gym) are costly.
- The lake is a health hazard.
- Sometimes it is difficult to deal with bullying, as getting support from your school can worsen their experience.
- Young people expressed interest in the opportunity to be leaders in their community.
- Participants highlighted the strengths in having younger youth workers and they found them easier to talk to and like they could relate better.
- Sometimes they did not attend events because they were unaware they were happening until after the event.
- Discussed ways for youth programs to be advertised better (social media, Instagram, school newsletters, radio, snapchat ads).
- Three weeks of health education/year is not enough.

- Some young people found the presentations/workshops they did attend to be triggering (brought up issues for them that made them feel uncomfortable/caused psychological and emotional distress) and struggled as they felt they were given no warning of the content.
- Present health and wellbeing workshops/presentations to students in year levels rather than assemblies as it is more effective.
- Presentations to be more engaging/use of humour.
- Some participants noted how the use alcohol/underage drinking and drugs such as marijuana and “mdma” is common.
- When talking about careers, it would be better to talk about what you are good at and how to turn your passion into a job/employment.