

Submission Response

WA Future Youth Strategy Response

11 DECEMBER 2017

BACKGROUND

The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) is the peak body for Aboriginal health in Western Australia, with 22 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) currently engaged as members.

AHCWA's mission statement provides this description of its purpose:

"The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia exists to: Lead the development of Aboriginal health policy, influence and monitor performance across the health sector, advocate for and support community development and capacity building in Aboriginal communities, support the continued development of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and build the workforce capacity to improve the health, social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Western Australia".

Central to AHCWA's core functions is its representation and advocacy of Aboriginal communities and its 22 member services; with the ability to influence policy and provide state and national level representation.

INTRODUCTION

AHCWA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of a new and integrated WA youth strategy. The AHCWA Youth Program aims to support Aboriginal young people living in Western Australia so that they can thrive and grow into healthy young adults. The program is driven by young people with a focus on the issues of importance affecting young Aboriginal people in the community.

The AHCWA Youth program achieves this by leading the development of Aboriginal health policy, advocating for and supporting community development and capacity building, upskilling Aboriginal youth and building workforce capacity.

The AHCWA youth program is currently developing a nation-first WA Aboriginal youth health strategy. This strategy will inform and guide health-related services and stakeholders to deliver effective services and programs that optimise the health and wellbeing of young Aboriginal people aged 10-25 years in WA. A state-wide consultation with Aboriginal youth and services working with Aboriginal youth is currently underway to guide the development of this strategy.

Our feedback provided below has largely been driven by the information sourced from our state-wide consultations.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

What specific programs would help young Western Australians make choices about their future?

AHCWA recommends the following programs to help young Aboriginal people to make choices about their future:

- Early intervention programs that focus on education and training should be prioritised to help young people in WA make choices about their future. Early intervention programs can equip young people with essential skills and knowledge for making positive and healthy decisions later in life. An example of this might include programs that focus on developing general life skills that assist young people to navigate the health system, apply for jobs, obtain safe accommodation etc.

AHCWA believes that early intervention programs should be holistic and should always prioritise the health and wellbeing for young people. Programs that have a strong focus on addressing the social determinants of health should also be prioritised, especially for early intervention and prevention programs.

- Youth mentoring programs would also be extremely beneficial for assisting young people make choices about their future. As mentioned in the “Better Choices: Youth in WA” discussion paper, having a meaningful relationship with a mentor can have positive outcomes for many young people.

It is worth noting that the success of mentoring programs is often due to the length of time taken to build a trusting relationship between a mentee and a mentor. In many regional and remote areas of WA, staff turnover can be relatively high which can negatively impact on mentoring programs and the outcomes for the young people involved. This should be taken into consideration when developing mentoring programs for young people.

- Programs focusing on work readiness training and employment opportunities would assist in equipping young people with the skills and knowledge to make choices about their future.

- Culture and identity should be a core component of all programs designed specifically for Aboriginal youth in WA to make choices about their future. Acknowledging and accepting one's culture and cultural practices can help young people make decisions on who they want to be, and what they want their future to look like. A positive step forward in this space would be to include education on Aboriginal culture in the primary and secondary school curriculum. The Aboriginal health sector also plays a significant role in designing and delivering these programs for Aboriginal youth in their respective regions.
- Positive family programs that address the social and emotional problems faced by many young people and their families that can cause poverty and disadvantage. These programs should increase awareness of the contributing factors that result in poor family wellbeing and aim to build good foundations to overcome these factors.

Do you have suggestions on how to implement these programs?

AHCWA suggests the following actions for ways in which to implement these programs:

- These programs should be implemented with guidance and advice from the target audience – young people as well as relevant services and sectors currently engaging with youth.
- All subsets of access and engagement services (health, education and training, engagement) should work cohesively to achieve a common goal. Each of these services impact on each other and this should be further acknowledged across the youth sector.
- Comprehensive program evaluation strategies should be integrated into program implementation to ensure sustainability, growth and improvement and potential learnings for other locations.
- Any evaluation results or data collected should be shared within and between relevant sectors so that it can inform the development and implementation of future similar programs.
- Sustainable funding models should be set up for new and existing programs to ensure that there is time to see results and collect outcome data.

Do you have suggestions for specific programs in regional areas?

AHCWA recommends the following programs for Aboriginal youth in regional areas:

- As previously mentioned, AHCWA is currently developing a nation-first state-wide Aboriginal Youth Health Strategy, which is being guided by a state-wide consultation with Aboriginal youth aged between 10-25 years. Preliminary results from this consultation show that there is a need for drug and alcohol prevention and education programs, youth rehabilitation centres, and culturally appropriate youth mental health services that address the needs of Aboriginal youth.



- Preliminary results also show that programs that bring young people back to their land and their culture can be extremely useful and are enjoyed by many Aboriginal youth. (E.g. camps that take young people out to country, cultural dances etc.). These programs work well when they take a holistic approach, and include aspects of health education or training alongside traditional cultural practices.
- Holistic programs that focus on community connectedness are extremely important and beneficial in regional and remote areas where isolation is often a barrier to accessing services and can leave young people feeling very alone.
- More programs focusing on work readiness training and employment opportunities are needed in regional areas.
- Capacity building within the Aboriginal health sector will ensure that specific programs in regional areas for Aboriginal youth are delivered successfully and are sustainable.
- Crisis accommodation services that take on a holistic approach through offering life skills and re-direction services and programs. Crisis accommodation services are well placed to be point of referral for many young people, and staff should be trained accordingly on how to provide appropriate referral information.
- Programs in regional areas should be holistic and have a “one-stop-shop” approach, not dissimilar to the “Youth service hubs” outlined in the discussion paper as an example of best practice. Having one physical location from which services can be coordinated makes it simple for young people to navigate the system. Public transport is often a barrier to accessing services in regional areas so it is critical to ensure the service is in a central and easily accessible location.
- Each regional or remote town is different, so it is important that young people in the community are consulted prior to the implementation of any youth programs or services. Programs in remote areas are also more likely to be successful if they are youth and community-led, therefore it is essential that young people take ownership over the program.
- Programs using digital engagement strategies may be useful for enhancing young people’s connection with service providers and combating feelings of isolation, however would be less useful in remote areas of WA where internet and reception is not readily available. We recommend that time is spent investigating this aspect prior to implementing a programs that rely on digital engagement strategies in regional and remote areas.
- It is important that programs and services for young people in regional areas (especially those targeting Aboriginal youth) create a sense of empowerment and self-determination that fosters lifelong skills.

How can we improve access to young people and the youth sector to relevant programs?

AHCWA recommends the following suggestions for improving access to programs for Aboriginal young people and the sector:

- Improved promotion and visibility of relevant programs to young people and the services that support them is a recommended action. Additional funding should be provided to services and organisations to promote the services they offer to a wide audience using a range of different promotion and engagement strategies. There is a multitude of youth-based services available to young people across the state. However, it is common to hear that young people are not aware of what is available to them.
- Youth services should accurately reflect their client base (in terms of age, culture, gender, literacy levels etc.) so that young people feel comfortable accessing their service. Organisations should prioritise cultural safety, cultural competencies and community involvement in order to engage with different cultural groups and communities.
- Referral pathways should be kept simple. Services need to work collaboratively to ensure that young people are appropriately and accurately referred to the right service. A central youth service directory (similar to “Pling!”) should be updated and used regularly by services. Youth service staff should receive appropriate education on how and where to refer young people.
- Programs should be youth-led and youth-friendly. Ensure that there are young people included in the process of planning, implementing and evaluating programs and services.

Do you have suggestions for specific programs in metropolitan areas?

AHCWA recommends the following programs for Aboriginal youth in metropolitan areas:

- It is important to ensure that programs in metropolitan areas are not “re-inventing the wheel”. There are currently a large number of youth-based programs and services available in metropolitan areas. Therefore, new initiatives should be integrated into pre-existing programs, organisations and locations. Services should work cohesively to ensure that there is minimal duplication.
- Programs in metropolitan areas should have a simple referral information for staff, other services and young people. It can often be overwhelming for a young person to know where to go and what service is right for them.
- As per comments made in the previous question on regional areas, programs should be youth-led and community-led, where young people and the community have the ability to take ownership over their program.

- Additional crisis accommodation services that take on a holistic approach through offering life skills and re-direction services and programs.
- Digital engagement strategies and programs would be useful in metropolitan areas as it is a simple way to connect young people to services, reach a large number of people, and combat feelings of isolation. Digital engagement strategies would work well for access and engagement, targeted intervention and re-direction and re-entry services.

Where should the focus of youth programs lie? e.g.: on access and engagement, targeted intervention, or redirection services

All three types of youth services (access and engagement, targeted intervention and redirection services), as identified in the discussion paper, are equally important and each play a role in ensuring that young people in Western Australia are healthy, safe and have opportunities to grow and thrive. Funding, effort and resources should be distributed across all three service streams, whilst ensuring that they work together collaboratively.

AHCWA would also like to make note of the importance of cultural safety and cultural appropriateness for programs targeting Aboriginal young people. The needs of diverse groups of young people should be acknowledged and respected when designing and delivering youth programs and services.

Any other comments

On page 10 of the Better Choices: Youth in WA Discussion paper it was mentioned that there is a limited provision of health services in the Peel region. It is worth noting that many other regions of WA also lack comprehensive youth health services, especially in very remote areas where access to health care is often inconsistent.

The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia advocates on behalf of 22 Aboriginal Medical Services in Western Australia, to ensure that the health needs of the State's communities are represented at all levels