

Wellways practice framework: Working with young people

In Australia, the prevalence of mental health problems among young people is higher than any other age group: approximately 14% of 12-17 year olds and 27% of 18-25 year olds experience mental health or substance abuse problems each year. The short and long-term consequences of mental illness include impaired social functioning, poor educational achievement, substance abuse, self harm and suicide. Young people from marginalised groups—including multicultural people, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and sexuality and gender diverse people (GLBTQIA) can experience especially poor outcomes.

This underlines the need for a youth-specific approach that effectively minimises distress to the young person and their family, prevents the progression of illness and enables the young person's recovery and development into adulthood.

1.1 Wellways principles in working with young people

We will:

- recognise that young people have strengths and expertise that will enable their recovery
- ensure that young people are at the centre of making decisions that impact on their lives
- enable young people to build strong connections with peers, positive mentors, friends and community networks
- take a holistic approach to wellbeing and recovery that recognises social, emotional, mental, spiritual and developmental dimensions of health
- take a collaborative approach to working with the young person, their family and support networks and work to involve families at all stages of decision making and support
- work to strengthen or re-establish natural support networks, and ensure that families are provided with effective education and support.

1.2 Evidence base for the Wellways approach to working with young people

The literature on youth developmental work highlights the importance of a holistic understanding of health that recognises social, emotional, mental, spiritual and developmental dimensions. In working with young people who experience mental health issues, attention needs to be given to normal developmental tasks as part of supporting the person in their recovery process.

Critical focus areas in working with young people with mental health issues include the development of positive self-identity and self-esteem, building and strengthening family and friendship networks, developing strategies to manage safety and risk, developing life skills and resilience through integrating learning from experience, support to engage in education and work, and the development of meaningful roles within community life.

1.3 Features of the Wellways approach to working with young people

Wellways will:

- respond rapidly and flexibly in engaging young people and offer easily accessible, brief interventions that will enable individuals to set tangible and attainable goals and to see progress quickly and build self-efficacy
- take a proactive approach to safety and risk issues, and work collaboratively with the young person and their supports to develop strategies to manage these
- engage young people in conversations about substance use, with initial focus on building trust, and providing access to information and peer support

- Actively assist young people to engage or re-engage in education where this has been disrupted. This includes access to supported education and supported employment services that use the Individual Placement and Support model
- Provide accessible and inclusive information and support to young people from diverse backgrounds, including multicultural people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Asexual (GLBTIQA). This includes the use of appropriate technology and media in engaging and communicating with young people
- Offer peer support, including our evidence-based Wellways peer education for young people and for families and friends
- Support young people in participating and taking leadership in continually improving our services.

1.4 References

Orygen Youth Health Research Centre. (2014). Tell them they're dreaming. *Work, Education and Young People with Mental Illness in Australia*.

Wierenga, A. & Wyn, J. (2011). Generic Youth Development Framework. Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.

Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) (2012). Mental Health fact sheet: Statistics on mental health in Australia Retrieved from www.mhca.org.au/documents/StatisticsonMHinAustralia.pdf

Community Recovery Model

People affected by mental health issues have the right to create a good life by making a home, engaging in meaningful work or learning, and building good relationships with friends, family and people in their community.

The Wellway's Community Recovery Model recognises that real and lasting recovery does not occur in isolation, and can be best achieved by working at three levels to:

- promote recovery and positive change for people with mental health issues
- assist families and friends in building resilience
- create welcoming communities.

