



Chair
House Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

24 March 2021

Inquiry into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Dear Chair

The Salvation Army thanks the House Select Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement and is one of the largest providers of social services in Australia. Through our financial counselling, emergency relief, domestic violence, housing and homelessness services, as well as our thrift stores, we see how mental health and ill-health touch every part of Australia. It is clear that mental ill-health and suicide have a significant impact on Australian society.

We appreciate that the Committee is giving this issue attention and prominence but, fundamentally, what we need is action.

There have been numerous previous inquiries, royal commissions, reports and action plans at the state/territory and Commonwealth level and we would recommend these to the Committee.

Most pertinently, the Australian Government Productivity Commission conducted an expansive inquiry, producing the extensive Mental Health Inquiry Report (**Productivity Commission Report**), which was handed to the government in June 2020. The report provided detailed analysis of a broad range of factors and concerns relating to mental health and made a comprehensive list of recommendations.

The findings of this inquiry led to a broad but detailed list of the appropriate steps that can and should be taken to address mental ill-health and prevent suicide in Australia. All 20 recommendations and 102 actions included within the Productivity Commission Report should be implemented. If there needs to be prioritisation of actions, our experience would point to the following three areas:

Founders **William & Catherine Booth**
General **Brian Peddle**

*Wherever there is hardship or injustice, Salvos will live, love and fight
alongside others to transform Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus*

Income Support

Based on our experience providing support to those with mental ill-health, The Salvation Army supports the development of an improved income support mechanism to support the recovery of those with mental illness experiencing unemployment.

The principles of recovery-oriented mental health practice should see mental health consumers describe themselves as being in recovery, retaining hope and healing through empowerment and connection. The current requirement for permanent impairment for an applicant to be eligible for the Disability Support Pension contradicts a recovery-oriented approach to mental illness. This results in many people experiencing mental ill-health and unemployment being placed on the JobSeeker Payment, which imposes significant mutual obligations on recipients. There is some flexibility in these requirements but a requirement to apply for jobs when not yet ready to keep a job, and the ever-present risk of having payments suspended causes undue stress. It also diverts their focus from getting well.

The Salvation Army believes that Recommendation 19 and Actions 19.1 to 19.5 of the Productivity Commission Report, and their focus on an individual's recovery could be facilitated by a new category of income support aimed at providing recovery-oriented support. The details of this payment would need to be developed in close consultation with those who have lived experience of both mental ill-health and unemployment. The object of this payment would be to allow an unemployed person experiencing mental illness and ill-health to prioritise their own recovery and empower them to gradually return to work as they become able.

Recommendation: Develop an improved income support mechanism to support the recovery of those with mental ill-health experiencing unemployment, as outlined in chapter 19 of the Productivity Commission Report.

Recommendation: Introduce, after consultation with those with lived experience, a new category of income support aimed at providing recovery-oriented support in accordance with current best practice.

Housing

The interplay of housing and mental illness is a significant concern to The Salvation Army. From research conducted by the Psychology Australia Local Services (**PALS**) and The Salvation Army's Beacon housing program, as much as 52 per cent of Beacon housing applicants had a mental health condition. Recommendation 20 of the Productivity Commission Report pinpoints the steps that states/territories and the Commonwealth can take to ensure that housing and homelessness services better support the needs of those with mental ill-health. The Salvation Army particularly endorses the Actions 20.1 to 20.3, which address the shortfall of public housing places, the gap in homelessness services for those with severe mental illness, and the linkages between mental health and acute mental health care facilities.

Recommendation: Prioritise implementation of Actions 20.1 to 20.3 of the Productivity Commission Report.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Finally The Salvation Army sees many community members fall through the gap between primary care services and specialist mental health services. This gap, known as the 'missing middle', represents a key shortcoming in the mental health response system. It is well documented that those who fall within the missing middle typically need to wait until their health has deteriorated into crisis for care to become available and their needs met. Too often this lag will have caused a loss of quality of life, with treatment both more expensive and less effective due to the delay. Recommendation 12 of the Productivity Commission Report concluded that a shortage of services, inadequate information, service delivery problems (including the limited access in regional areas) and the costs faced by recipients were the major barriers to these intermediate level supports. Action 10.4 and Actions 12.1 to 12.4 identify the steps the government can take to begin to fill this gap in services and prevent Australians with mental ill-health entering crises.

Recommendation: Prioritise implementation of Actions 10.4 and 12.1 to 12.4 of the Productivity Commission Report.

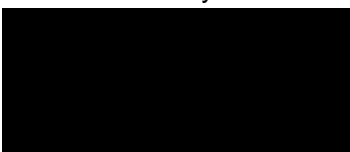
Conclusion

Noting these key concerns to us and the community members we serve, The Salvation Army would again like to stress that the key to addressing mental health and preventing suicide in Australia is action. Recent royal commissions, Productivity Commission inquiries, consultations and action plans from the National Mental Health Commission, have provided significant direction and steps to strengthen mental health care, detection and social support. There is not a lack of research or policy direction. Repeated broad-based inquiries and consultations, without action being taken, do little to address the needs of those experiencing mental ill-health.

Recommendation: The Salvation Army recommends that action is taken to implement the recommendations of the Productivity Commission inquiry into Mental Health.

Again, The Salvation Army thanks the Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours faithfully



Paul Hateley, Major
Head of Government Relations
The Salvation Army Australia

