



MENTAL HEALTH POLICY PROPOSAL

Supporting the establishment of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission

April 2019

OFFICIAL POLICY OF THE NEW ZEALAND YOUNG NATS.
NOT NATIONAL PARTY POLICY.

ISSUE

- 1.0 The Young Nationals (Young Nats) believe that one of the biggest issues currently facing young people today is mental health.
- 1.1 New Zealand's current mental health system is failing to provide adequate care and support not only for young people, but for most of the population. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. The Young Nats have highlighted some of the following key issues:
 - 1.1.1 There are a significantly large number of mental health service providers offering a multitude of different services, ranging from the promotion of mental wellbeing, to education, to acute intervention. Consistent feedback from young people has been that there is a lack of cohesion between these providers and therefore a relatively ad hoc provision of essential mental health services. As a result, there is an abundance of some services (such as telephone helplines) but a severe lack of others (such as follow-up care post-discharge from hospital).
 - 1.1.2 There is a significant lack of research and professional knowledge of mental health relative to physical health. As a result, many mental health policies and so-called best practices are yet to be firmly established in our health system due to uncertainty of results. This lack of knowledge trickles down to a lack of awareness and understanding among the rest of society, further perpetuating the everyday stigma surrounding mental health.
 - 1.1.3 Despite mental health having reached crisis point in New Zealand, there are relatively few accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that sufficient funding and policies are provided. As a result, the provision and prioritisation of mental health services varies with political cycles.

PROPOSAL

- 2.0 The Young Nats support the re-establishment of an independent Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (the Commission). the *He Ara Oranga – the Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction (He Ara Oranga)* recommendation that the government establish an independent Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (Commission).
- 2.1 The Young Nats propose the scope of the Commission's purpose is expanded to include responsibility for developing and reporting against a strategy to ensure all New Zealanders have access to an appropriate level of mental health services – services appropriate for their needs, at all times and in all places.
- 2.2 The Young Nats call on the government to implement a well-funded and resourced Mental Health Commission as a matter of priority.
- 2.3 Young Nats call on the government and MPs to ensure the Commission has adequate representation of stakeholders in the mental-health sector, with specific emphasis placed on the voice of young people, as a primary user.

BACKGROUND

- 3.0 There is strong anecdotal evidence to support the proposition that young New Zealanders struggle to access the mental health services they require, especially at an optimal time and place.

- 3.1 New Zealand's mental health system is plagued with systemic issues. Research tells us the most significant issues are:
 - 3.1.1 exclusively high eligibility criteria for services;
 - 3.1.2 a myriad of disparate service providers that do not effectively interface, which leads to a convoluted system which is difficult to navigate;
 - 3.1.3 inconsistent service presence across a geographical split; and
 - 3.1.4 a system that is overall unfit for purpose.
- 3.2 11.8% of New Zealand young people are struggling with psychological distress.
- 3.3 New Zealand has the highest youth suicide in the OECD.
- 3.4 Improved access to mental health services for young people cannot be achieved with a few simple policy responses. Policy makers must resolve the systemic issues noted above in order to address accessibility issues at the root cause. The issues above will only be remedied by wide-ranging structural reform. This must begin with mapping the current system and developing and implementing a long-term strategy to achieve an improved future state.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.0 The Commission will provide for an expert-supported body that has the capacity and independence to support development and implementation of robust and enduring sector strategy.
- 4.1 A new independent commission will be the most effective mechanism to unify and give confidence to the numerous and unintegrated array of existing government and non-government service providers under a national strategy that every provider believes in and is motivated to contribute to.
- 4.2 To fully utilise the Mental Health Commission, the Young Nats propose the inclusion of specific responsibility for ensuring and reporting against an ambitious accessibility target within the ambit of the Commission will ensure every element of the government's work plan to implement the report's recommendations is framed by an overarching goal to improve accessibility. This recommendation is not included as a component of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction's Mental Health Commission presently.
- 4.3 Building the right foundation for successful reform of the mental health system at the root causes of the most severe issues will enable tangible change that is not currently possible. For example:
 - 4.3.1 24 hours access to primary mental health care and crisis services at every hospital;
 - 4.3.2 increased system capacity and cohesion to allow lowering accessibility criteria stringency for moderately afflicted patients; and
 - 4.3.3 more comprehensive and more widely geographically distributed mental health 'one stop shops'.
- 4.4 Young people presently lack a dedicated voice at the national level in regards to mental health related issues. Whilst politicians and celebrities actively engage in this space, the cut through is not achieving the desired results. A Mental Health Commission will offer young people this dedicated, expert and respected voice on a national stage that is able to exert influence over decision-makers to seek the best results possible.

- 4.5 Whilst this proposal is high-level, there is undeniable need for structural reform to occur in the mental-health sector prior to substantial change and improvement is made to mental health outcomes. The establishment of a Mental Health Commission provides for an advocacy and advisory body to support these deep, and required, structural changes prior to low-level policy can take effect.
- 4.6 The Young Nats recognise that Commissions have limited statutory power to drive change. However, independent and expert advisory and advocacy bodies play a key role in the public arena. These bodies have a high-level of public trust and work to ensure both the general public, politicians and decision-makers alike are informed and able to make steps forward in the best interest of the respective sector. This is seen to great effect in Prime Ministers Chief Science Advisor, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment and Children's Commissioner.