



MENTAL HEALTH POLICY PROPOSAL

**Funding mental health first aid training
programmes.**

April 2019

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

ISSUE

- 1.1 The Young Nats believe a significant barrier to supporting mental health in New Zealand is the limited understanding the general public has in how to identify, support and advise those with mental health issues. This is especially true for those with mild to moderate mental health needs who are often looked over in favour of those with high level needs. This 'missing middle' are often not provided the support they require due to existing resource constraints on mental health support provision. The Young Nats are proposing a policy that endeavours to build mental health support into the communities we live in, establishing understanding, compassion and know-how in everyday Kiwis to support those around them.

PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The Young Nats propose the establishment of a contestable fund to assist those seeking to undertake mental health first aid training programmes.
- 2.2 Organisations such as St. Johns have been coordinating mental health first aid training programmes in New Zealand since early 2018, which have been developed under the guidance of local and international experts¹. However, the high cost of the courses and the resource capability of the organisations running them are significant barriers to increased uptake.
- 2.3 These programmes empower members of the public to identify and provide early intervention to members of their community who may be suffering from various mental illnesses. They provide participants with the confidence and ability to refer those in need to professional mental health services if necessary, fostering a peer to peer support system within our communities.
- 2.4 A contestable fund will allow individuals, businesses and organisations desiring to participate in mental health first aid training able to apply for funding to subsidise the cost of participating. This will enable more New Zealanders to participate, leading to an increase in qualified mental health "First Aiders" in our communities.
- 2.5 The provision of the fund will need to be coupled with a public information campaign to increase knowledge of the opportunity, how to apply and existence of mental health first aid courses to maximise potential upside.

¹ <https://www.stjohn.org.nz/News--Info/News-Articles/st-john-launches-mental-health-first-aid/>

BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Currently, New Zealand is facing a mental health crisis. This has led government and policymakers to look at innovative ways of combatting this nationwide issue.
- 3.2 Individuals can find it difficult to open up about mental health struggles to people they don't know, showing the need to equip and empower communities with the skills necessary to be a first point of contact.
- 3.3 The previous National Government invested \$100 million in a cross-agency contingency to trial new approaches to improving mental health, while also helping to build an evidence base of 'what works'.²
- 3.4 The 2014/15 New Zealand Health Survey reported an estimated 636,000 adults (17%) have been diagnosed with a mood disorder and/or anxiety disorder at some time in their lives (including depression, bipolar disorder and/or anxiety disorder), and, 225,000 (6.2%) of adults reported experiencing mental distress in the previous four weeks (including anxiety, confused emotions, depression or rage).³
- 3.5 The number of people who have taken their own lives in New Zealand is the highest since records began, with 668 dying by suicide in 2018.⁴
- 3.6 A 2017 Unicef report found that New Zealand had the highest youth suicide rate in the developed world. 15.6 in 100,000 of 15-19 year olds were reported as dying by suicide.⁵
- 3.7 The 2018 Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction ("the report") reported that to improve mental health and addiction outcomes, we must address the wider social determinants that influence not just mental health, but wider social wellbeing.
- 3.8 The report stated this is a long-term project and must start immediately.⁶ The current Labour-led Government has made minimal moves towards implementing a plan as of yet.
- 3.9 The current Labour-led Government's Mental Health and Addiction Action plan emphasises the role people have to play right across the continuum, not only in support

² <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/mental-health-and-addictions/mental-health/new-mental-health-care-initiatives>

³ <https://wellplace.nz/facts-and-information/mental-wellbeing/mental-health-in-new-zealand/>

⁴ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/106532292/new-zealand-suicide-rate-highest-since-records-began>

⁵ https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC14_eng.pdf

⁶ Above n 4

roles. The plan states that the individual plays a valuable role in the way we provide mental health services.⁷

- 3.10 In 2016/2017, approximately 96% of mental health funding (\$1.35 billion of \$1.4 billion) was spent on mental health patients seen to be in “severe” need of mental health attention. The percentage of people fitting this criteria for severe need was approximately 3%. Only approximately \$30 million was spent on those seen to have mild-moderate or moderate-severe needs, making up approximately 17% of the population.⁸ Investing more into those with mild-moderate and moderate-severe mental health problems may in the future prevent these patients from progressing to meeting the criteria for severe needs.
- 3.11 Submissions on The Report overwhelmingly showed people feel that the current mental health system that tends to focus on responding to, rather than preventing, mental illnesses and crises. In particular, respondents to the inquiry expressed interest in a universal community based mental health programme that would operate alongside the current crisis response model providing services to those who acutely need them.⁹

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 A number of studies have shown that undertaking mental health first aid training significantly increases participants’ confidence in their ability to provide help to those suffering from a mental illness, which in turn increases the amount of help provided in the community.¹⁰ Studies have also shown that after participating in a mental health first aid course, participants were more likely to correctly identify a specific mental illness. As well as this, participants’ beliefs about treatments became more concordant with those of health professionals, and stigmatising attitudes towards mental illness significantly decreased after taking the course.¹²
- 4.2 This increased knowledge and supportive behaviour will help with providing peer-based support in the community.
- 4.3 This will in turn help to support the “missing middle” - those who are identified as having mild-moderate or moderate-severe mental health needs, but whose needs

⁷ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/mental-health-addiction-workforce-action-plan-2017-2021-2nd-edn-apr18.pdf> at p 36

⁸ <https://mentalhealth.inquiry.govt.nz/assets/Summary-reports/He-Ara-Oranga.pdf> page 32

⁹ <https://mentalhealth.inquiry.govt.nz/assets/Summary-reports/He-Ara-Oranga.pdf> page 36

¹⁰ Jorm, A., Kitchener, B., O’Kearney, R., Dear, K. *Mental health first aid training of the public in a rural area: a cluster randomised trial*. BMC Psychiatry. 2004; 4(33).

¹¹ Kitchener, B., Jorm, A. *Mental health first aid training for the public: evaluation of effects on knowledge, attitudes and helping behaviour*. BMC Psychiatry. 2002; 2(10).

¹² See 10 as above

aren't severe enough to be considered for immediate or crisis mental health treatment.

- 4.2 Using peer-based support services for mental health allow the person receiving the support to feel less like a patient stuck in a rigid system and more like a valued citizen of a community¹³. Those suffering from mental illnesses may also be more likely to feel intimidated by a professional figure such as a doctor or therapist, and may feel more comfortable sharing with someone familiar in their day-to-day life. Relationships between peer-support recipients and providers may feel more empathetic and reciprocal to those between recipients and professional health care providers¹⁴.
- 4.3 Further, many rural and isolated communities do not have immediate access to health professionals such as GPs and counsellors. Since 2013, 108 farmers have committed suicide¹⁵. The introduction of peer-based mental health first aid programmes into these communities will help increase support for those who may be struggling and not otherwise have someone to talk to about their concerns.
- 4.4 Supporting access to a mental health first aid programme can assist in the development of a generational change in attitude to the stigmatisation around mental illness and create a more compassionate and empathetic population.
- 4.5 In short, mental health first aid training programmes are a net-positive. However, there are two key barriers to participation in existing mental health first aid training programmes:
- 4.5.1 Cost: In 2019 St John's course cost \$179.00 for 8 hours of training and Coliberate's course cost \$790.00 for 12 hours of training. This significant upfront cost, and time spent, is not affordable or attractive for many individuals, businesses and organisations to invest in. This leads to limited uptake and reduced positive outcomes in the mental health space.
- 4.5.2 Capability: The capability and resource of the organisations offering these courses is limited. By establishing funding support for those looking to participate in a course, these organisations increase their potential customer base and revenue streams. This provides a free-market answer to supporting their service offering and ability to operate.

¹³ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/ResourceFinder/MHC-power-of-peer-support-services.pdf>

¹⁴ Miyamoto, Y., Sono, T. *Lessons from Peer Support Among Individuals with Mental Health Difficulties: A Review of the Literature*. Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health. 2012; 8:22-29.

¹⁵ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/107671865/call-for-new-approach-to-rural-mental-health-in-wake-of-latest-rural-suicide-statistics>

- 4.6 To increase participation in these programmes, more support is required. A contestable fund will allow individuals, businesses and organisations desiring to participate in mental health first aid training able to apply for funding to subsidise the cost of participating. This will enable more New Zealanders to participate, leading to an increase in qualified mental health "First Aiders" in our communities.
- 4.7 The Young Nats believe in be investing in communities to build resilience, self-reliance and peer support. A contestable fund to help increase the uptake of mental health first aid courses is a key step in promote these principles in mental health policy.

