

March 2020

TOGETHER

Coronavirus and Community Mental Health

The mental health sector is challenged in these uncertain times as it wrestles with the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on service delivery and consumer care. Mental health organisations support people in distress every day, and during times such as this, there are additional anxieties experienced by staff, colleagues and consumers. The very clear message coming through is that it is more important than ever to support each other and work with government and other agencies to get through this pandemic.

While there are numerous ways COVID-19 is affecting services and communities and it changes every day, two issues in particular are being raised by MHCC member organisations. Mental health organisations are working hard to maintain service delivery while keeping staff and consumers safe and many services are moving to digital platforms and staff working remotely. However people supported by community mental health organisations often need face-to-face services and navigating the requirements around social distancing and personal hygiene is challenging.

Like the rest of the health sector, organisations are reporting difficulties accessing the personal protective equipment they need such as hand sanitiser and masks to deliver services safely. Organisations are also concerned about the impact of changed service delivery methods on consumers and the need for flexibility from funding bodies.

The second and related issue is how the move to delivering many services online will impact on an often disadvantaged and digitally isolated group of people. Service providers are engaging with the people they support to better understand what technology people have available and how comfortable they are with using it. Anecdotally it appears that a significant number of consumers are not well set up or are not comfortable using online services. These are not easy issues to address, they will require understanding, collaboration and innovation in how organisations and consumers engage with and use technology.

Community mental health organisations and other non government service organisations are critical in the response to COVID 19 and both the Australian and NSW Governments have announced a raft of measures to support services. MHCC, alongside other peak bodies will continue to advocate to decision makers about the myriad of issues that impact our sector, while at the same time keeping members up to date with the latest information. In an environment where things are changing rapidly, it is important to keep in touch with authoritative websites that have accurate and up-to-date information and MHCC has a range of links on its website, along with advice about how people can look after their own mental health.

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Message from the CEO

The impact of COVID 19 is dominating our energy and time at the moment but for many communities this latest disaster comes after the fallout from one of our worst ever bushfire seasons - where more than 18 million hectares was burnt, nearly 3000 homes were destroyed and tragically more than 30 people died. There are so many distressing images of the destruction wreaked by the fires but also extraordinary images of firefighter's heroic bravery, communities supporting each other and the generosity of strangers.

The summer of fires touched everyone in some way and like so many workplaces, here at MHCC we tried to make sense of it by sharing stories about own and other's experiences. We know that distress hits communities in different ways but it is very apparent from people who have experienced bushfires previously, that the impact can be long lasting. Individuals continue to live with the effects long after the rush of community support and good will has passed on.

There is so much to be done to address the economic, ecological and emotional havoc caused by the bushfires, and we know from 2009's Black Saturday fires that mental health must be front and centre in the reconstruction effort - both immediately and in the longer term. Six months to two years after the fires is the time of real difficulty, after the immediate shock of dealing with the fires has passed. As people realise their lives will not just go back to normal, feelings of stress, anxiety and depression can increase. Disasters like bushfires also produce a high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can take years to recover from. One of the MHCC staff shared a story of a man who spent the afternoon in a multi-level car park because it felt like the only place he could feel safe, when the smoke that was blanketing Sydney brought back traumatic memories of an earlier bushfire experience. The work of mental health service providers is going to be affected by the events of the summer into the future - support needs to be there for the long haul.

Previous fire tragedies have also taught us the importance of recovery being led by communities rather than imposed from outside, and we need to make sure resources are directed in this way. Professionals play a valuable role, but family, friends, workmates and local networks are more important in helping people get back on their feet. Community mental health organisations, with on-the-ground knowledge, connections built over decades and a strong understanding of trauma and mental health recovery are an essential part of this process. We are in very uncertain times at the moment and we are all going to be stretched by the demands that COVID 19 imposes but we must not forget in this new predicament, the needs of bushfire affected communities.



MHCC CEO: Carmel Tebbutt

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Workforce Report: Casual Positions Dominate Amid Rising Demand for Workers

Findings From NSW CMO Mental Health Workforce Survey

MHCC has released the final report on the NSW CMO Mental Health Workforce Survey. The survey was conducted by Human Capital Alliance in collaboration with MHCC and members in 2019, to improve understanding of the size and nature of the workforce. Community organisations surveyed provide diverse services that complement specialist mental health care and primary health care, particularly for people who live with psychosocial disability.

This state-wide survey of the community mental health sector workforce found one-quarter of people who work in mental health in NSW are employed by CMOs. The survey found CMOs in NSW employ about 4,745 paid staff (3,464 FTE) in addition to 4,160 volunteers. More than two-thirds are women, and half are employed on a temporary or casual basis.

The high level of insecure employment is concerning as NSW and national mental health reform strategies, and the NDIS, require increasing psychosocial supports for people with ongoing mental health conditions, driving demand for a qualified and stable workforce.

The survey, which MHCC hopes to repeat regularly, also revealed just over a third of the workforce is degree qualified, while half of workers hold a vocational education certificate.

Other findings include:

- The largest workforce category is mental health support workers (62.8%) followed by allied health workers (11.6%), and peer workers (11.3%). Psychiatrists and other medical practitioners make up 1.4%
- 28% of workers have a lived experience of mental health conditions (not necessarily in peer work roles)
- Two-thirds of the workforce is under 45 years
- More than half of the organisations have volunteer staff
- More than 80% of mental health workers are employed by one of nine large CMOs, although there are many small organisations.

The report will help MHCC continue discussions about investing in the community mental health workforce, contribute to advocacy efforts on behalf of members, enable us to identify workforce opportunities and challenges, and pursue capacity building strategies to better serve the sector in years to come.

Find the [full report](https://mhcc.org.au) at
mhcc.org.au

• See the media coverage
• of the report [here](#).



Call for Substantial Reform in Mental Health

In a [second submission](#) to the Productivity Commission inquiry into mental health, MHCC highlighted the need for substantial systemic reform to create a different kind of mental health system. This system would

- reflect a trauma-informed recovery-oriented approach to care
- promote a human rights perspective aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability
- maximise self-determination and social inclusion, promoting

“Over the long term CMOs address more than just the symptoms of illness”

There is much in the Productivity Commission [draft report](#) that MHCC agreed with, particularly the focus on putting consumers at the centre of service delivery, recognising social determinants of health and documenting the significant cost of mental illness. The Report acknowledges the major gap in mental health services between primary and acute care - the “missing middle” - and discusses the shortfall in psychosocial support services and specialised clinical care provided in the community. However, the Report refers to psychosocial supports as generally complementing community based clinical services. MHCC emphasised that they are much more than this. MHCC pointed out that CMOs represent a diversity of standalone services which play a vital role in supporting

recovery. These services are key to maintaining wellness in the community for people with enduring mental health conditions, and over the long term, they address more than just the symptoms of illness.

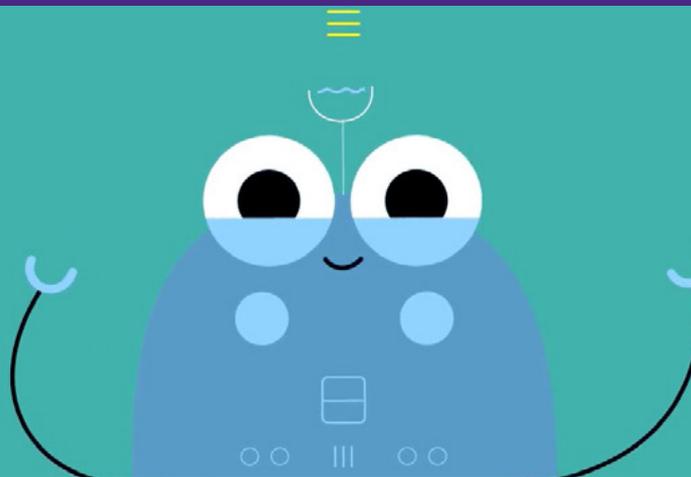
MHCC stressed that the Productivity Commission final report should recommend expansion of CMO mental health support services and additional funding to enable this to occur. It should address service gaps through the provision of psychosocial rehabilitation and support services. **MHCC hopes our submission will contribute to achieving these outcomes by providing a better understanding of the services provided by CMOs in NSW and the workforce which delivers them.**

Find all MHCC Submissions Here
www.mhcc.org.au/our-work/submissions/

Read the Productivity Commission Draft Report
www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/mental-health/draft

YES-CMO asks how your experience has been with our service

Graphic excerpt from survey promo animation



Survey Pilot: Your Experience of Service

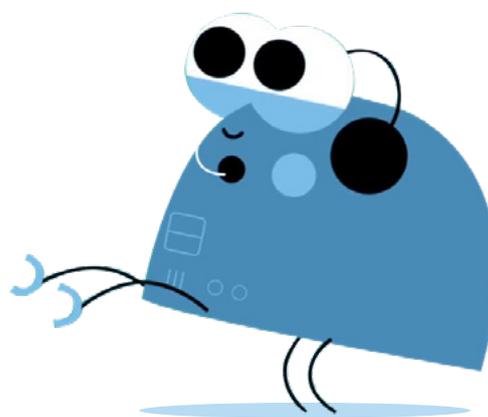
The Your Experience of Service - Community Managed Organisations (YES-CMO) questionnaire is being piloted in the NSW community managed mental health sector. The questionnaire is designed to gather information from people with a lived experience of mental health conditions about the support they receive from CMOs. By understanding the experience of service users, CMOs can improve services and make changes so consumers are best supported throughout their time with the service.

The YES-CMO questionnaire was co-designed with mental health consumers across Australia, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and led by the Australian Mental Health Outcomes and Classification Network (AMHOCN).

Are all CMOs offering the questionnaire?

The YES-CMO questionnaire is being piloted in selected CMOs to evaluate suitability for further rollout. The CMOs participating in the pilot include

- Aftercare
- Independent Community Living Australia (ICLA)
- Neami
- New Horizons
- Open Minds
- One Door
- Wellways



Find further information on

- [The YES-CMO Service Handbook and Implementation Guide](#)
 - [The YES-CMO Launch Presentation for Services](#)
- at mhcc.org.au/our-work/blog



Building Research Skills in AOD and Mental Health Sectors

This year, CMHDARN is producing a series of webinars on basic research skills, to support people who may not have formal training to implement research within their services. Each webinar will have a slightly different format, with panel discussions, lecture presentations, case studies and Q&A sessions.

The first webinar, “Why Research” was held on the February 5 and was very well received. The panel was facilitated by Dr Suzie Hudson (Clinical Director, Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies) with panel members

- Dr Belinda Green - Senior Research Officer - Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre
- Dr Rebecca Hardy - Evaluation Manager - Black Dog Institute
- Dr Peter Kelley - Associate Professor - School of Psychology, University of Wollongong

Topics included definitions of research and evaluation, the benefits of undertaking research, including the value to services and communities, and how to start research.

View the webinar and resource list [here](#):

cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au

This webinar will explore co-production, what it means, how to engage with co-production in research in a meaningful way and how to get started.

REGISTER [HERE](#)

A bit about the presenters:

Brett Bellingham and Holly Kemp are consumer researchers at University of Sydney with lived experience expertise, as well as expertise in peer support work, mad studies and consumer/survivor/ex-patient explanatory frameworks. Jo River is an academic at University of Sydney and a social scientist specialising in mental health. Jo brings expertise in social theory and research methodologies to the collaboration. Brett, Holly and Jo have been working together on various co-production projects since 2017, and recently co-founded ‘The Coproduction Collective’ with colleagues from University of Technology Sydney.



CMHDARN
Community Mental Health, Drug & Alcohol
RESEARCH NETWORK

CMHDARN Community Research Mentoring Program

Applications are now open for the Community Research Mentoring Program run by CMHDARN. The program is open to MHCC or NADA members who want to develop and conduct research guided by an expert mentor. Designed to support practice-based research, the program helps to build the skills of the mentee and to equip them with knowledge about research processes and measuring impact and outcomes. The scope of each project is worked out between the mentor and mentee. Themes can include

- developing research questions
- how to conduct a literature search
- advice on evaluation of a service
- assistance with the analysis of data
- advice on quantitative or qualitative studies within a service

What Mentee's say:

Mentoring really helped to establish our practice-based research and to navigate the many options on relevant research methodology.

What Mentor's say:

"It has been fantastic being part of the CMHDARN mentoring program and to facilitate the application of research methods to real-world settings. I have thoroughly enjoyed developing relationships with the fabulous frontline workers I have been mentoring."

To apply email

info@cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au
or visit cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au

CMHDARN, the Community Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Research Network, was established in 2010 to broaden involvement of the community mental health and alcohol and other drugs sector in practice-based research. CMHDARN is a partnership between the Mental Health Coordinating Council, the Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies and the Mental Health Commission of NSW.

New Resources to Build Capacity and Share Research

My Health Connector: Add Your Service

Wentworth Healthcare's My Health Connector is an online directory to help people improve their social connections. Health service providers, support groups and other service providers in Hawkesbury are encouraged to list their service.

myhealthconnector.com.au
<https://myhealthconnector.com.au/>

Meeting Needs of People with Disability from CALD Backgrounds

Our Voice, by Settlement Services International, helps service providers meet the needs of people with a disability from CALD backgrounds. Trained Lived Experience Educators come to your office to provide a free learning activity.

www.ourvoice.ssi.org.au
<https://www.ourvoice.ssi.org.au/>

Free Law Handbook Chapter on CMOs

Redfern Legal Centre has a new edition of The Law Handbook and a chapter on community organisations, with info on incorporating an association, companies limited by guarantee, co-ops, registering a name, tax, appeals for funds and more.

legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au
<https://legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au>

Snapshot of LGBTI Mental Health

The National LGBTI Health Alliance has launched the updated 2020 Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTI People.

lgbtihealth.org.au/
<https://lgbtihealth.org.au/>

The Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia

An online resource for organisations and individuals to enhance their cultural responsiveness, mapped against national standards to help meet existing requirements, with a wide range of supports and resources

embracemantalhealth.org.au
<https://embracemantalhealth.org.au/>

Neami Co-designed Medication Brochure

"Hear me, support me - it's my medication" is a Neami co-designed brochure on medication guidelines. It was co-developed by consumers, staff and Neami NSW for staff supporting consumers about medication.

www.neaminational.org.au
<https://assets.neaminational.org.au>

Cultural Safety in Health System for Indigenous Australians

A new monitoring framework by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare assesses progress in achieving cultural safety in the health system for Indigenous Australians. It measures culturally respectful health care services, Indigenous patient experience and access.

www.aihw.gov.au/
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports>

Social Impact Toolbox

UTS has launched the Measuring Social Impact Toolbox, a free tool to help organisations in the not-for-profit sector to evaluate their social impact in a way that is reliable and accessible.

www.socialimpacttoolbox.com
<https://www.socialimpacttoolbox.com/>

Read [View From the Peak](#) online to access direct links.

While MHCC endeavours to provide the most up-to-date information, we cannot comprehensively endorse the work of external organisation.



Certificate course graduates celebrate

Graduation Ceremony a Shared Milestone

Graduates from our certificate courses in mental health and peer work met with MHCC staff for a graduation ceremony in Sydney CBD in February. It was a pleasant gathering with students speaking about their journey and experiences of the course before a group of family and friends. MHCC congratulates all graduates on their success.

Here, graduate Claire Hanslow shares her experiences of the course.

What led you to enrol in MHCC Peer Work training?

I have always had an interest in mental health and in pursuing a career that would help support people who are challenged by mental distress, even before realising it was something I was experiencing myself. Originally I hoped to become a school counsellor and came close to the end of a primary teaching degree to do so. Unfortunately, uni was the perfect storm to test if my experiences of what I now know was cPTSD and Depression/Anxiety could have its ceiling blown off into the dizzying heights of mania also.

I had to re-evaluate what kind of career would allow me to self-care enough to sustain and would support me to identify as someone with lived experience instead of feel it had to be hidden. I wanted to use what I had learnt to help empower others with similar challenges and offer connection and support. When I finally heard about Peer Work, I knew I had struck gold and sought out someone with Peer Work experience to learn from.

Can you tell us about your Peer Worker role?

I am employed as a Mental Health Peer Worker for Hunter New England at Hunter Valley Mental Health Service. The kind of support offered is person centred so it is led by what the individual would prefer. It



Graduate Claire Hanslow addressed the gathering

may involve sharing safe and purposeful lived experience, connection, validation, recognition of strengths, assistance navigating the mental health system, identifying and working towards goals and values which could increase quality of life, assisting with self or peer led advocacy and systemic advocacy. I am also hoping to increase my involvement in facilitating groups.

What did you find most interesting in the training?

I don't think I could have successfully taken on the challenge of my Peer Work role without the informative and supportive experience of the Peer Work Cert IV. I am so grateful to our trainer Emma for her immense knowledge, generosity of sharing and genuine expression of self. I think that any time people with lived experience meet, magic happens. It inspires me and gives me strength when I am able to connect with a group of people who live with mental health conditions and I feel privileged to witness any of the stories they share.

Read Claire's full speech [here](#).



Reimagining NDIS Access

There is a flurry of activity in the Reimagine Stage 2 team, with the re-launch of reimagine.today coming up in May. Peer Leaders across NSW/ACT, NT, QLD, SA, TAS and VIC are producing new resources with co-design groups, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQA+ people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people living in rural and remote areas. Over 20 resources will be added to reimagine.today, designed to reach these communities in an accessible way.

Some key messages from all our co-design groups include:

- Information is best shared through stories – we are capturing stories from many people through video, animation and other storytelling methods
- Keep things simple – we are simplifying content and developing infographics and pamphlets, to share key points about NDIS access.

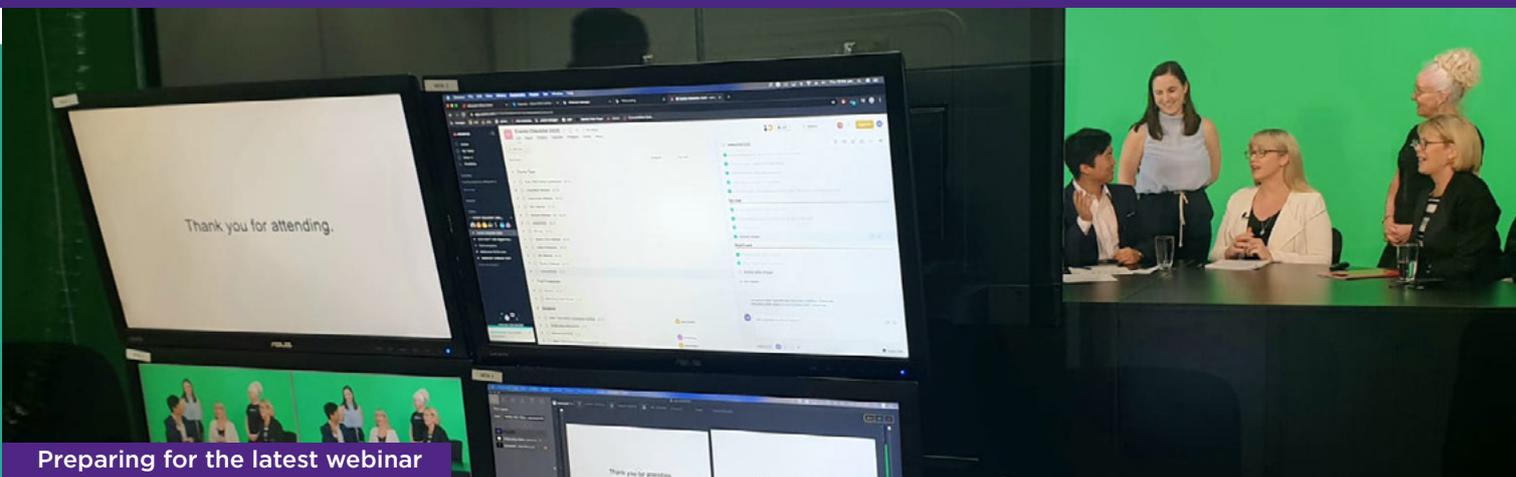
Read more at
mhcc.org.au/our-work/projects

Contact Project Officer Rebecca Lewis on 02 9060 9636 or email Rebecca.l@mhcc.org.au
Reimagine Stage 2 is funded by the NDIA through the National Information, Linkages and Capacity building (ILC) Readiness Grants, Round 2.

On set as people share experiences of psychosocial disability and the NDIS

“Information is best shared through stories”





Embracing Change in Psychosocial Services with New NDIS Practice Standards

The Embracing Change project aims to create greater national awareness of NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators, as they apply to providers of psychosocial support services. MHCC received funding from the Australian Government to deliver ten webinars and a national forum, to unpack and demystify the new NDIS Practice Standards. The webinars also help providers to demonstrate conformance to the new standards.

The most recent webinar, “Embracing Change Core Module 2: Governance and Operational Management”, was the third webinar in the series. It was very well received and highlights include -

Sherie Avalos, acting Director of Registrations at the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, who explained what the quality and safety benchmarks are for a provider’s systems of governance and operations management, risk, quality and information management.

Fiona Loughlin, General Manager, Institute for Healthy Communities Australia Inc, an approved quality auditor, shared what evidence auditors look for when determining if a provider conforms with the benchmarks set by the NDIS Practice Standards.

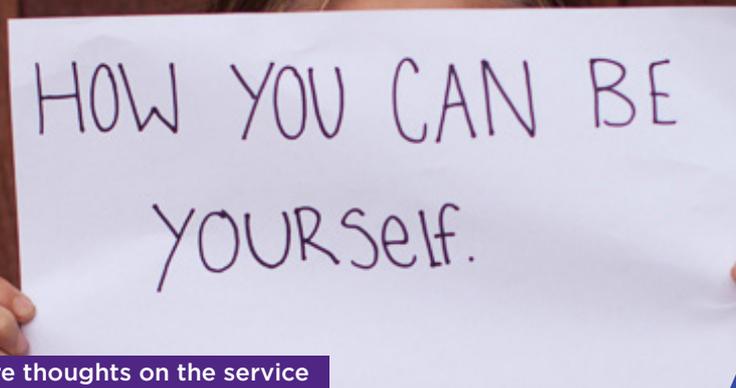
She also shared some encouraging examples of NDIS participants with psychosocial disability being interviewed in a safe and trauma-informed way during an audit. The interview was conducted on the beach while the participant was fishing, with the support of a trusted worker.

The next webinar in the series will look at quality and safety benchmarks for feedback and complaints, incident and HR management and support continuity. We will hear about meeting these benchmarks from a provider delivering services to people with a psychosocial disability.

Webinars and resources can be accessed [on demand](#)

The NDIS Quality and Safeguard Commission released updates in early 2020.

Find them [here](#)
www.ndiscommission.gov.au/providers/notice-changes-events.



ReFrame visitors share thoughts on the service



MHCC was delighted to visit the team at [Community Links Wellbeing](#) in Bowral and to hear about the ReFrame youth mental health support service.

Community Links formed in 1987 and later became an amalgamation of four services in Wollondilly. In 2018 it merged with Wingecarribee Family Support and in November 2018, opened two youth mental health walk-in sites providing holistic support, called ReFrame, in Bowral and Tahmoor.

The area covered by Community Links Wellbeing is huge, including Wollondilly, Camden, Campbelltown and Wingecarribee Local Government Areas.

The ReFrame youth service supports young people, 12-25, living in Wollondilly and Wingecarribee. It provides multidisciplinary mental health professionals and youth workers in both a walk-in centre and outreach framework. Outreach is important because transport is a barrier to young people seeking mental health support. Outreach includes school visits, home visits and events. ReFrame also has links with local GPs and other community organisations to provide a wraparound service, funded by South West Sydney Primary Health Network.

ReFrame's first year saw rapid uptake and walk-ins, due to its soft-entry focus, inclusive non-judgmental attitude and free service. Youth peer workers with lived experience are key to the program's success. Kids come both before and after school, they play pool, eat

MHCC is a member organisation. Our members help shape the future of mental health policy in NSW. Here we feature Community Links Wellbeing.

healthy food, socialise, talk about anything, take part in any activities on offer and have access to allied health professionals (psychologists, dietician, GPs). There is a self-run LGBTIQ+ group.

Lived experience and peer workers are valued and the service is recovery-oriented and trauma-informed.

The popularity of the ReFrame service underlines evidence that young people in rural areas have increased risk of mental health conditions due to a variety of factors such as stigma, cost of support, lack of knowledge about services, lack of transport, waiting times, lack of involvement in the support process and past negative experiences of services.

The Bowral walk-in service sits in the centre of town, with a downstairs meeting area, pool table and kitchen, with further meeting rooms and kitchen upstairs.

The visit provided the opportunity to hear first hand from the dedicated and committed Community Links staff who told MHCC that recent bushfires have resulted in a lot of anxiety and trauma from the front line as well as vicarious trauma. This has been felt across the myriad of services provided by Community Links Wellbeing, including community development, events, groups, workshops, crisis support, carer support, family support, allied health and mental health services.



Our Members lead the way with innovative projects that support people to live well. In this edition we focus on a new PANDA mental health resource that supports parents anxious about environmental disasters, the Coronavirus and the future.

There has been a great deal of confronting material in the news recently. Whether it's the coronavirus, climate change, bushfires or floods, we know many people across Australia are feeling anxious about what's happening in the world. Many are also concerned about what's happening right now and how it might affect their future and that of their children.

Those expecting a baby or with a new baby just arrived, are particularly vulnerable. It can be hard to balance the joy and excitement of pregnancy or having a new baby with a fear of a global epidemic or concern for what the future holds.

Over the past few months PANDA's National Helpline has seen a 5% increase in calls from expecting and new parents feeling worried about events like the coronavirus and the bushfires. As a result the team at PANDA has created a [new resource](#) for expecting and new parents struggling with anxiety related to any natural disaster, global crisis (like the Coronavirus) or concerns for the future.

The resource draws on many years of evidence-based research and the experience of callers to the Helpline to outline ways to manage anxiety and maintain emotional wellbeing. It includes advice around self-care and being conscious of your own needs, how

What is PANDA ?

PANDA, Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia, is the national peak body supporting expecting and new parents and families to understand and recover from perinatal anxiety and depression, a serious and potentially devastating illness that affects around 100,000 Australian families every year.

to use exercise to ease stress and manage anxiety and mindfulness techniques to help people feel calm and simply experience their emotions and physical feelings without being overwhelmed by them.

The resource also encourages those who continue to feel anxious to reach out for help, including via PANDA's [Mental Health Checklist](#) for Expecting and New Parents, a free online tool to help users self-assess their emotional wellbeing.

Find the [Mental Health Checklist](#) and [new resources](#)

at panda.org.au

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mhcc.org.au/our-members

Help MHCC set the agenda for the Community Managed Mental Health Sector and define the messages that we campaign on and communicate to government agencies and service bodies. We need your experience to inform the future shape of our sector. Become an MHCC member today!