



Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project

IMPROVING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

FAQs

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What is the purpose of the Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project?

The purpose of the project is to look at how the Government can improve services for young people with, or at risk of, mild to moderate mental health problems. The Prime Minister wants a more ambitious and effective government response to youth mental illness. This package is designed to build on strengths in current provision and address gaps.

How did the Youth Mental Health Project start?

In his report *Improving the Transition* the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Professor Sir Peter Gluckman, highlighted the risks facing young people in New Zealand as they transition from childhood to adulthood. In response, the Prime Minister asked the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to lead a cross-government project to improve services for young people with, or at risk of, mental health problems.

Who has been involved?

The project has been led by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. It has included officials from the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Development, Te Puni Kokiri and the Treasury.

Officials have consulted a range of health, education and social development frontline practitioners and other stakeholders including youth mental health workers, youth workers, school principals, Whanau Ora providers and truancy service providers.

Professor Sir Peter Gluckman has chaired an expert reference group which provided quality assurance on the underpinning research and feedback on the proposals. The members of this group are Professor Sir Mason Durie, Associate Professor Sally Merry, Dr Russell Wills and Dr Peter Watson.

Why has the specific age of 12-19 years been chosen?

The age range was chosen to cover the secondary school years and the transition points into and out of secondary school. Many common mental health problems first appear during adolescence and problems such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse can have life-long consequences. There are around half a million young people between the ages of 12 and 19 in New Zealand.

What is the prevalence of mental health issues in these young people?

International evidence suggests the overall prevalence of youth mental health problems is likely to be around 20 per cent. Prevalence rates vary for different mental health issues.

Depression and anxiety are quite widespread. Depression mostly begins in adolescence and one in five young New Zealanders will be affected by depression by the age of 18 years. Almost one in five young people meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder by age 19.

Why focus on mild to moderate mental health?

There is a significant level of unmet need for young people with mild to moderate mental health needs. For example, of young people with depressive symptoms that would benefit from intervention, over 80% are untreated. Intervening early is an effective and cost-effective approach.

What will this package do?

This package will invest in evidence-based programmes that improve young people's resilience; identify mental health problems as early as possible; and provide effective, youth-friendly and timely treatment for those who need it.

No single intervention will overwhelmingly address youth

mental health issues. This package is therefore designed to build on existing successful interventions and to trial new initiatives for young people in schools, online, in their families and communities, and in the health system.

How did you decide what the package of initiatives should include?

Officials have reviewed literature on youth mental health and youth development. They have undertaken a stocktake of the current spend on youth mental health programmes (prevention and treatment), and identified gaps and weaknesses in our current system. The interventions in this package have been selected to address those gaps and weaknesses.

What evidence is there that the initiatives in the Youth Mental Health project work?

Some parts of this package build on established best practice. In other parts we are trialling new approaches based on international models. Success in an international context does not always guarantee success in New Zealand. The interventions in this package will therefore be monitored and evaluated before wide implementation. They will be reviewed after two years.

What is currently done to prevent and treat mental illness in young people?

The government funds a range of interventions.

Programmes that promote wellbeing are primarily funded by the Ministries of Education and Health and are usually provided through the school system, but provision and take up is patchy.

Programmes that target at-risk groups are provided by several agencies in a variety of settings, including schools, courts, primary care clinics and marae. These do not always have an explicit focus on mental health, however.

Treatment programmes include primary health services, counselling, emergency departments, and community and residential specialist services. There are gaps in coverage around the country and the services provided are not always appealing to young people.

What will this mean for young people and their families already using mental health services?

Young people and their families who are already using mental health services should notice some changes, such as that waiting times reduce and handover and follow-up improve.

How does the Youth Mental Health Project meet the needs of Maori and Pasifika youth?

Maori and Pacific young people are at comparatively high risk of mental health problems and have particular barriers to accessing services. Some tailoring and testing of specialised approaches for Maori and Pacific young people will be undertaken during the implementation of the package.

Whanau Ora has the potential to make a contribution to improving youth mental health. As part of the package, two Whanau Ora providers with mental health expertise will be contracted to work with 40 Maori and Pacific young people and their whanau/aiga over a two-year period.

How will the Youth Mental Health Project support families of young people with mental health needs?

Parents, families and friends of young people need better access to authoritative information on youth mental health problems. The package contains funding for non-government organisations to provide information to parents, families and friends on how to differentiate between normal adolescent behaviour and mental health problems, and where help is available.

How will the Youth Mental Health Project help young people get better access to mental health services?

This package will make mental health services much more readily available. It includes an increase in funding for primary care and an expansion of the group that this money can be used for to include more young people. School-Based Health Services will be expanded, allowing more young people to access services through their schools. E-therapy will be provided online: a good option for families who live far from services.

How much will be invested in the Youth Mental Health project?

In total, \$61.9 million will be invested in The Youth Mental Health Project over four years.

Will this package address New Zealand's high youth suicide rate?

Although this package is not specifically designed to address youth suicide, it is expected to help. The causes of suicide are complex, but depressive disorder is the leading risk factor.

The Youth Mental Health Project will complement a new Suicide Prevention Action Plan which will be developed this year under the leadership of Associate Health Minister Peter Dunne.

How will the success of the Youth Mental Health Project be measured?

The success of this package will be judged by movement over time in monitors of young people's health and wellbeing. The Prime Minister has directed a review of what has been achieved in two years' time.

How can I find out more about the Youth Mental Health Project?

More information about the Youth Mental Health Project is available on the following website:

www.beehive.govt.nz.