

Consumers of Mental Health WA (Inc.)

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ISSUE: Outcome of Group Services Tender

OBJECTIVE: Ensuring accessible, trauma-informed, demand-driven and safer group support services, especially those that are peer-led and which offer holistic understandings of, and approaches to, mental health issues.

BACKGROUND: CoMHWA members who are users of group services through Neami, Grow or Richmond Wellbeing have contacted us, either through our members' survey or through reaching out individually, to underline the impact the defunding of these services will have on their recovery journeys.

- Common themes expressed by CoMHWA members who have used these services include:
 - Concern that unique services (such as Hearing Voices) won't be replicated by the new providers, which takes away a safe place to share mutual experiences: *'I don't feel safe enough talking about my voices in other groups'*.
 - Anxiety and fear about having to trust and build relationships with new people: *'suicide will likely seem easier than starting again with a new service'*.
 - Feeling hopeless with the loss/change of a key part of their routine and feeling disempowered by the system making choices about them without consulting consumers: *'I will be simultaneously losing the support of a professional mental health worker and the closest thing to a friend I have'*.
 - The inaccessibility of services where they will cease in their local area, without a similar service being planned, especially in regional areas: *'All services offered are too far away and are not my safe-space'*.

POSITION:

- **CoMHWA believes that the transition period between services ending and beginning is not enough time.** Although extensions have been announced for services ending, we are concerned that existing services and incoming services will not have enough time to coordinate an effective, safe and trauma-informed transition period for their consumers.
- **CoMHWA is troubled that the evaluation of tender applications focused on establishing new programs rather than building capacity of and expanding existing programs.** It is unclear to consumers, service providers and to CoMHWA why programs that were performing well and had good engagement from service users were discontinued instead of being supported to improve. Creating new services where existing services were working undermines the efforts of these services.

- **CoMHWA is concerned that specific cohorts will fall through the gaps in the transition process.** We believe best efforts should be made so that unique services, such as Hearing Voices, should be carried over by new service providers so that service users have consistent support specific to their needs.
- **The impact this decision has on existing Lived Experience (Peer) workers appears contradictory to the work the Mental Health Commission has done to promote and strengthen the Peer Workforce.** The Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces framework, released last year, underlined the significance of embedding peer workers in mental health services. The defunding of these services means that existing, successful peer workers will likely lose their roles instead of being offered support to improve their careers and grow their capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Best efforts to be made to reinstate cohort specific services, or at least to transfer existing unique and successful services under new providers.
2. Best efforts to be made to reinstate services in outer-metropolitan and regional areas where services are due to cease.
3. The Commission to lead a project to evaluate the impact of the changes on the affected service users and lived experience (peer) workers.
4. More time given for transitional period to allow more communication with and support of consumers having to make the change between one service and another.
5. Review the process for any future services going to tender to ensure that key Commission decision makers;
 - a. Assign appropriate weighting in tender evaluations to existing services that can demonstrate previous service user involvement in the service development, as is assigned to new services that promote a new co-designed service,
 - b. Give due consideration to the effect of closing services where consumers will be adversely impacted
 - c. Ensure that tender outcomes are communicated to unsuccessful tenderers in a manner and timing that is reflective of the relationship between the Commission and the service provider