

14 June 2017

Committee Secretary
Health, Communities, Disability Services, and Domestic and Violence Prevention Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

Healthy Futures Commission Queensland Bill 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the draft Bill that will establish a health promotion organisation for Queensland.

beyondblue commends the proposed establishment of the Healthy Futures Queensland Commission. There is strong evidence which demonstrates the importance of intervening early in life to support good health and wellbeing. The Commission should provide an effective and efficient way to make population-wide improvements in promotion, prevention and early intervention.

The Bill identifies two clear objectives for the new Commission – to support the capacity of children and families to adopt a healthy lifestyle; and to contribute to reducing health inequality for children and families. To achieve these objectives, ***beyondblue* believes consideration must be given to a broader remit of work than solely healthy eating and obesity prevention, with specific consideration given to promoting good mental health and wellbeing.**

Depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. In Australia over one million people experience depression each year. Anxiety is even more prevalent, affecting over two million people nationally. Researchers estimate that just short of 900,000 Queenslanders are experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder, equating to around one in five people in the state. A large body of evidence suggests that around **half of lifetime mental health conditions start by mid-teens, suggesting a need to focus on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.**¹

¹ Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR & Walters EE (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age of onset distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey replication. Archives of General Psychiatry, 62, p 593.

There is not one single cause of a mental health condition, however, it is understood that there are a number of risk and protective factors that influence the likelihood of a person experiencing a mental health condition. A number of these protective factors can be influenced at a population level. They include employment, safe and affordable housing, financial security, a fair and tolerant community, and strengthening resilience.

Resilience is a way to describe someone's capacity to cope with changes, challenges and to bounce back from adversity, such as trauma, loss of a loved one, or changes to employment or relationships. *beyondblue* is currently conducting research on children's resilience to identify what influences children to become resilient. Of particular note, *beyondblue* is also exploring opportunities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to implement research to identify the cultural and identity factors that influence resilience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and young people.

An emerging body of research suggests that adversity in early life is linked to the development of non-communicable diseases, like heart disease and cancer, in adulthood. As such, bolstering children's resilience, irrespective of exposure to adversity, can positively influence the burden of disease and death in the future. ***beyondblue* therefore recommends that mental health and wellbeing are incorporated into the scope of the Healthy Futures Commission, to improve population health outcomes.**

beyondblue supports the specific inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the Bill. As with physical health, a significant gap exists between the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people. National research, survey and health services data shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are around:

- three times as likely to report high/very high levels of psychological distress as people who do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- two and a half times more likely to be hospitalised for intentional self-harm than people who do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- twice as likely to die by suicide as people who do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (three times as likely in Queensland).²

Incorporating an explicit focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families into the Act is therefore warranted.

beyondblue recommends the following amendments to the draft Bill to recognise the role of mental health in achieving a healthy future for Queenslanders:

A reference to *mental health* in clause 9.1 a) as follows:

- a) to support the capacity of children and families to adopt a healthy lifestyle, including by promoting healthy eating, regular physical activity, and mental health and wellbeing.**

A reference to the cultural determinants as they relate to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland as follows:

- a) the social and cultural determinants of health and the effects of the determinants on health inequity.**

In establishing the Healthy Futures Commission, the Bill should support it to work in an integrated way, across all levels of government and with other statutory bodies for the achievement of its goals. In particular, the Queensland Mental Health Commission was established under legislation to 'drive

² Productivity Commission (2016). Report on government services 2016. Chapter 12 Mental health management. Accessed from <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2016/health/mental-health-management>

ongoing reform towards a more integrated, evidence-based, recovery-oriented mental health and substance use system.' Included in their scope is promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies for the achievement of good mental health. For the true achievement of a healthy future for all Queenslanders, these two Commissions must be supported to work collaboratively and constructively, with both the Government and the communities in which they operate.

Yours sincerely

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