



1st February 2022

Joe Kelly MP, Member for Greenslopes, Chair
Mental Health Select Committee
Parliament House
George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
MHSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders*. Like many non-government community based services, Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI) continues to deliver face-to-face services and are experiencing increased demand for support and complexity in client situations. The pandemic requires us to continually pivot in response to public health guidelines, changes in the risk environment and to ensure safety for both clients and our workforce. This has created significant strain on resources. Whilst we recognise the importance of this inquiry, and have provided the following brief written correspondence, the intensity of our work with young people and the very short timeframe for written submissions means we are unable to provide a more detailed written submission at this time. We would however, welcome the opportunity to meet with you and members of the Mental Health Select Committee to provide you with a more comprehensive understanding of the issues that young people in Far North Queensland face.

(YETI) has significant concerns as to the lack of appropriate mental health and alcohol and drug (AOD) treatment options for young people in the Far North Queensland region. Specifically, YETI engages with a highly vulnerable group of young people (10-25 years old), predominantly from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island backgrounds (over seventy per cent of all clients). The following points are key to consider when looking for opportunities to improve the mental health outcomes of the young people we work with.

- Young people we support scarcely access mental health treatment services, including state-funded services. Young people we work with are rarely accessing services with fixed clinical appointments nor school based services.
- Young people we work with who engage in AOD treatment often experience multiple barriers to accessing primary health care and mental health services. YETI would like to see extension of outreach style services with a focus on addressing multisystemic disadvantage.
- Many of the young people we work with have contact across a range of service systems. In particular, the Child Safety, Youth Justice, Adult Justice and Homelessness services/systems.
- Our work with young people entails thorough intake and assessment, consideration of trauma and systemic disadvantage, culturally appropriate service provision, and integrated work alongside a range of government partners.



- YETI recognises that cross system coordination and integration are key to good outcomes for young people in Far North Queensland. YETI leads multiple cross-government/non-government partnerships in Cairns to support vulnerable young people.
- YETI acknowledges that AOD treatment with young people is complex and nuanced and requires highly skilled practitioners, with strong engagement skills who can form trusting relationships. Youth alcohol and drug work is a specialist field and the types of supports we provide cannot be replicated by GP or telehealth style services.
- Stability of funding and investment in workforce development and training is key to ensuring YETI can continue our effective work with vulnerable young people.
- YETI leads state-wide work on Volatile Substance Misuse (VSM) and inhalants and we are keen to see that the recommendations from the Inhalant Roundtable meetings that occurred in late 2020 are implemented.
- YETI have facilitated a very popular weekly LGBTIQ+ youth group for over twenty years. The group is unfunded and is the only one of such type in a regional community. The cohort of young people attending the group have significant unmet mental health needs.

Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI) has delivered drug and alcohol treatment programs for young people in Cairns for over twenty years. We employ over fifty staff (approximately twenty from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island backgrounds). YETI provides a range of youth services in Cairns and capacity-building programs more broadly across the region including the Cape York, Torres, and Lower Gulf regions. AOD treatment services that we provide include:

Psychosocial interventions and case management (funded by Queensland Health)

This program targets young people aged 12-25 years who are at risk of, or who are already engaging in the use of drugs and/or alcohol. The service works with young people to reduce, cease or support safer use. The target group includes young people relocating to Cairns or engaged in transient lifestyles between Cairns and other communities. The service also provides support to young people who access the YETI day program. AOD services include:

- Case management
- Interagency coordination and collaboration
- Outreach
- Crisis intervention
- Group activities

Drug and Alcohol Counselling (funded by the North Qld PHN)

This program provides appropriate and effective counselling interventions for young people between the age of 12 - 25 years who are 'at risk' of or engaging in the use of illicit drugs. Primarily these young people are aiming to reduce, cease or use more safely. The interventions are provided within a holistic, empowering, and strengths-based model of care. This program is flexible,



innovative, and youth orientated and aims to meet the needs of individuals, families, groups, and the wider community.

Just North (funded by the National Indigenous Advancement Agency)

The Just North program addresses volatile substance use (VSU) and supports youth workers and other professionals working with young people in Far North Queensland. Just North works to build capacity by supporting youth workers in Far North Queensland and the Lower Gulf to:

- Create new networks
- Build on learning and developing new skills and knowledge
- Develop new service delivery models
- Seek funding or explore different ways of using existing funding
- Improve the way we work together to deliver services to young people

RADIO (Remote Alcohol and Drug Interventions and Outcomes) (funded by North Qld PHN)

AOD support for young people in the Cape York and Torres regions. RADIO provides young people in remote communities with:

- Information and referrals
- Support to reduce AOD use
- Coordinated case management
- Help to improve social and emotional well being
- Help to build connections with family and community
- Connections to other services

This program is delivered in partnership with partner organisations across the Cape York and Torres regions. These include Cooktown District Community Centre, Gungarde Community Centre Aboriginal Corporation, Mossman Elders Justice Group, NPA Family and Community Services, Torres Health, and Weipa Community Care Association.

We recognise that these points are very brief and we welcome any opportunity to be involved further in an accompanying consultation process. I can be contacted on [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely

Genevieve Sinclair
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Empowered Towards Independence