

Youth Justice Reform Select Committee inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland

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Submitter Comments:

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(all residents of Central Queensland)

23rd November 2023

Ms Shannon Fentiman MP
Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women
AND

Ms Brittany Lauga MP
Assistant Minister for Health and Regional Health Infrastructure
Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service
PO Box 501
QUEENSLAND 4700

Re. Closing of an Important Youth Health Initiative — CQ Youth Connect

Dear Ms Fentiman and Ms Lauga,

We are writing to you as members of the community in Central Queensland, and as active participants in community services and community change in our region.

Some of us have done paid and voluntary work for Queensland Health including with CQ Youth Connect. We are colleagues and in some cases friends of Friederike McCartney, the Clinical Nurse Consultant who established CQ Youth Connect. None of us is currently employed by or contracted to Queensland Health.

Some people in our community have been told that CQ Youth Connect is being closed down. This has been a valuable service in our community for 10 years. It has strong connections with community organisations, volunteer organisations, health practitioners and providers inside and outside Queensland Health, including an extensive referral network.

We have some questions:

1. Why has nothing been announced about closing CQ Youth Connect?
2. Why are they closing down an existing program that is providing clinical and educational services addressing mental health, alcohol and other drug use and sexual and reproductive health to young people in the community?
3. Why aren't they modifying the existing well-regarded service?
4. Who has been consulted in making this decision? (And why have community partners and consumers not been consulted?)
5. Is CQ Health really willing to abandon a vibrant engaged network of youth health and social services providers in the community?

6. What is going to replace this service for the breadth of young people in our community that are currently being supported by CQ Youth Connect?
7. Why is CQ Youth Connect being shut down before its replacement is set up?
8. What is going to be done in the interim for these young people?
9. What is being done to acknowledge the huge contribution that has been made by CQ Youth Connect in the lives of young people?

We are mystified as to how we have come to the point where CQ Health is shutting down this community institution, especially with such a shortage of community-facing public health activity, health promotion and education.

There seems to have been a structured attempt to minimise the significant impact of CQ Youth Connect. This has included:

1. Closing down without explanation the much anticipated and hardly-given-time-to-succeed CQHHS Youth Health Reference Group. It took a number of years to establish this valuable initiative, with support from the Hospital and Health Service's Consumer and Community Advisory Committee and from the community. This was a great initiative, not only contributing to meeting the HHS's obligations under Standard 2 Partnering With Consumers, but more importantly providing a voice for young people to influence how health services are delivered.
2. The annual CQ Youth Interagency Health Forum is this year in its 10th year, and for the first time the community committee decided to ask Every Child CQ to host the event instead of it being hosted by CQHHS. This was because the Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing was suggesting that there would be governance risk in the HHS hosting the event, and she was considering closing down the event. This event has been successfully hosted by the HHS for 9 years, providing a valuable opportunity to learn and network and reinforce the bonds of shared commitment to the health of young people in our community. More than 200 people attended this event, including people involved in health, education, disability, youth justice, emergency services and other community services.
3. The two identified Indigenous Youth Engagement Officer positions in CQ Youth Connect that have been vacated this year have not been filled – diminishing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our health service, and reducing the effectiveness of CQ Youth Connect. The founder of CQ Youth Connect had to fight hard to secure these positions and retain them through successive challenging budgets.

4. And the petty removal of the car that had been based at Community Health for the use of CQ Youth Connect staff, making trips to Woorabinda and other regional sites more complex and time-consuming.

CQ Youth Connect effort has achieved much in bringing together the efforts of diverse service providers to address inequity in a positive and collective manner. It has a huge role and has established great recognition across our region as a community health initiative for young people.

As an indication of its impact and in gaining profile and leadership in collaborative health interactions for CQHHS, some of its noteworthy activities include:

- Conducting regular clinics at 7 sites around CQ. This included Woorabinda at a time when many services were not welcome to operate there for cultural reasons.
- Forging important community partnerships with diverse organisations, including Wadja Wadja High School, Baralaba High School, the Flexi Learning School and Carinity Education; the three CQ Headspace; Youth Justice and Child Safety; and lots of community organisations, including CQID, Darumbal Community Youth Service, Every Child CQ, and Lives Lived Well.
- Out of hours intervention to support young people through suicidality, homelessness, drug dependency and other personal crises, followed by appropriate referral and follow-up.
- Participation at Murri Binda's and other Mental Health Week activities, stalls at NAIDOC expos across the region, CQ Homelessness Connect, Women's Health Week, Ag-Grow! In Emerald, Beef Week, and other community events.
- Co-founding the CQ FASD Alliance and tireless advocacy for awareness, education and clinical services for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.
- Conducting Youth Opportunity Days in Rockhampton, Gladstone and Mt Morgan – identifying disconnected and unlinked youth and bringing them 'face-to-face' with foundational service providers that can help them to re-engage with assistance, providing inspirational speakers, fun activities and establishing a contact process for follow-up support. Funding for this was obtained outside CQHHS.
- Establishing, and subsequently working with a community organising committee, to run the CQ Youth Interagency Health Forum which brings together all service providers for Youth Support to share program, science and delivery information providing a platform for collaborative effort. This year in its 10th year!

- Creating and maintaining a comprehensive directory of youth, health and social services until it was handed over to My Community Directory (an online platform available for public access in ways that tracks all access and highlights use and need), and continuing to partner to ensure this can be sustainably produced without using CQHHS resources.
- Providing a great grounding in community health for a succession of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the Indigenous Youth Engagement Officer role. These young people have subsequently gone on to a wide range of work and volunteer health roles locally and nationally.
- Participating in the Rockhampton Community Based Crime Action Committee (CBCAC) – a Qld Government supported effort to develop collaborative approaches to addressing youth crime. Also participating in two of the CBCAC’s sub-committees – 1) Uniting Effort which has over three funded projects has scoped and developed a ‘world best practice’ model to address the underlying causation of youth crime; and 2) Instrumental in creating and nurturing the ‘Our Space’ partnership with Stockland Shopping Centre which provides a supported ‘drop-in’ centre on site for disengaged youth. This effort not only provides opportunities for CQHHS service integration and interaction, but has reduced youth crime across the shopping centre, has gained wide support from the shop owners and Stockland management which in addition to providing a free shop, is now funding staff and operating costs as Our Space seeks a permanent co-funding arrangement. This effort has gained both local and national attention.

Queensland Health and the CQHHS do not seem to appreciate the significant role of CQ Youth Connect in our community in educating young people about health and wellbeing; responding to health issues for vulnerable young people; providing advice and referral; in helping young people lead healthier lives, reducing future pressure on health services; and providing forums in which youth services providers can inform young people and peer services about their valuable services. This effort has developed wide respect in the community, in health services and across schools for Friederike McCartney as a CNC and an advocate for youth health. The partnerships and relationships described above have been forged over a decade. It would be a devastating loss to our community and to the HHS for these to be capriciously abandoned during an ongoing world-wide pandemic and at a time when young people are disengaging from education and employment at alarming rates.

Over the years CQ Youth Connect has received numerous awards at the CQ Health Awards Night. CQ Health also celebrated CNC Friederike McCartney being highly commended in the Individual Award for Outstanding Achievement at the Statewide Queensland Health 2019 Awards for Excellence, and presenting the CQ Youth Connect Model of Care at the 2020 Queensland Clinical Excellence State Conference.

We appreciate that there have been concerns about CQ Youth Connect being mainly funded by Making Tracks – a fund for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes.

CQ Youth Connect provides an integrated service – it provides services without prejudice and with a great deal of respect to young people in need, both those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and to those who do not. More than 12 community-controlled service providers also provide services to this cohort of youth demonstrating leadership and application of specifically Indigenous-designed programs into the wider community based on need. We want it noted that almost all of those organisations also provide services to non-Indigenous clients/patients.

In Geoff Higgin's role on the CCAC and in community network roles he asked questions about the review into Making Tracks programs in Central Queensland. It was difficult to find out who was undertaking the review, and the nature of the review. The CQHHS Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing eventually, reluctantly answered some questions. Although a commitment was made to share the PWC report with the CCAC, this has not occurred.

Executives at CQ Health seem to think that PWC consultants can come into our community for a few days or a few weeks and understand the contribution of a complex community health service offering — without talking to community partners and consumers, and seemingly without observing the service across a representative time period. Apparently service consumers and the vast range of community stakeholders in the network of CQ Youth Connect efforts were not approached during the review. Lyn Harland, Principal at Carinity Education Rockhampton, and one of these community stakeholders, raised this concern on ABC morning radio this week.

There have been discussions about the funding model for CQ Youth Connect over the years. CQ Health staff have been open about the funding challenges in providing community health services (clinical, promotional and educational). The model of care at CQ Youth Connect is about providing a practical, non-exclusionary service. Among the network of Indigenous disadvantaged people, many are non-identifying. Also, one way we in Central Queensland have met the 'Partnership' and 'Everyone's Business' principles in 'Making Tracks' has been by having this integrated service which does not turn anyone away. Exclusion has been a significant cause of health inequity and surely it is something that needs to be met 'head on' based on need.

Further, in our opinion, the CQHHS should have been making greater efforts to secure supplementary non-Indigenous-focused funding to put alongside the Making Tracks funds, to support the integrated nature of this service. Not closing things down, but supplementing the funds and expanding the capacity for all young people in Central Queensland.

We hope that we have been able to present a sufficiently coherent argument that CQ Youth Connect has an integral and ongoing role in our region's health journey. Please address the questions at the start of this letter, and consider committing to continue this valuable service.

If you would like to contact us to discuss this further, please call Geoff on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely, co-signatories:

Geoff Higgins Director, Performance People Pty Ltd (a consultancy working with community and health organisations in Central Queensland); former member and chair of the CQHHS's Consumer and Community Advisory Committee; member of the Rockhampton Community Based Crime Action Committee; member of Every Child Central Queensland; appointed to the Rockhampton Stronger Places, Stronger People Leadership Group; and member of the organising committee for the CQ Youth Interagency Health Forum.

Lyn Harland, Principal, Carinity Education Rockhampton; member of the Community Based Crime Action Committee.

Maxine Brushe, Immediate Past President of Every Child Central Queensland Inc.; and retired Chair of Gladstone Area Water Board.

April Ibbotson, Program Manager, CTC Shaping Futures into Work; appointed to the Rockhampton Stronger Places Stronger People Leadership Group (3 year position); the sole representative for Central Queensland on the WorkUP Queensland Respect-Based Training Project Advisory Group.

Clinton Pearce, Program Youth Mentor, CTC Shaping Futures into Work; member of the Rockhampton Youth Interagency Network; member of the Rockhampton Community Based Crime Action Committee; and member of the organising committee for the CQ Youth Interagency Health Forum.