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# A GLOBAL YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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## A RESOURCE TO DRIVE ACTION TO ADDRESS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

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Developed by Orygen as part of the  
Global Youth Mental Health Partnership project with the World Economic Forum



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- Alexandria Yaxley
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**DISCLAIMER** This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.

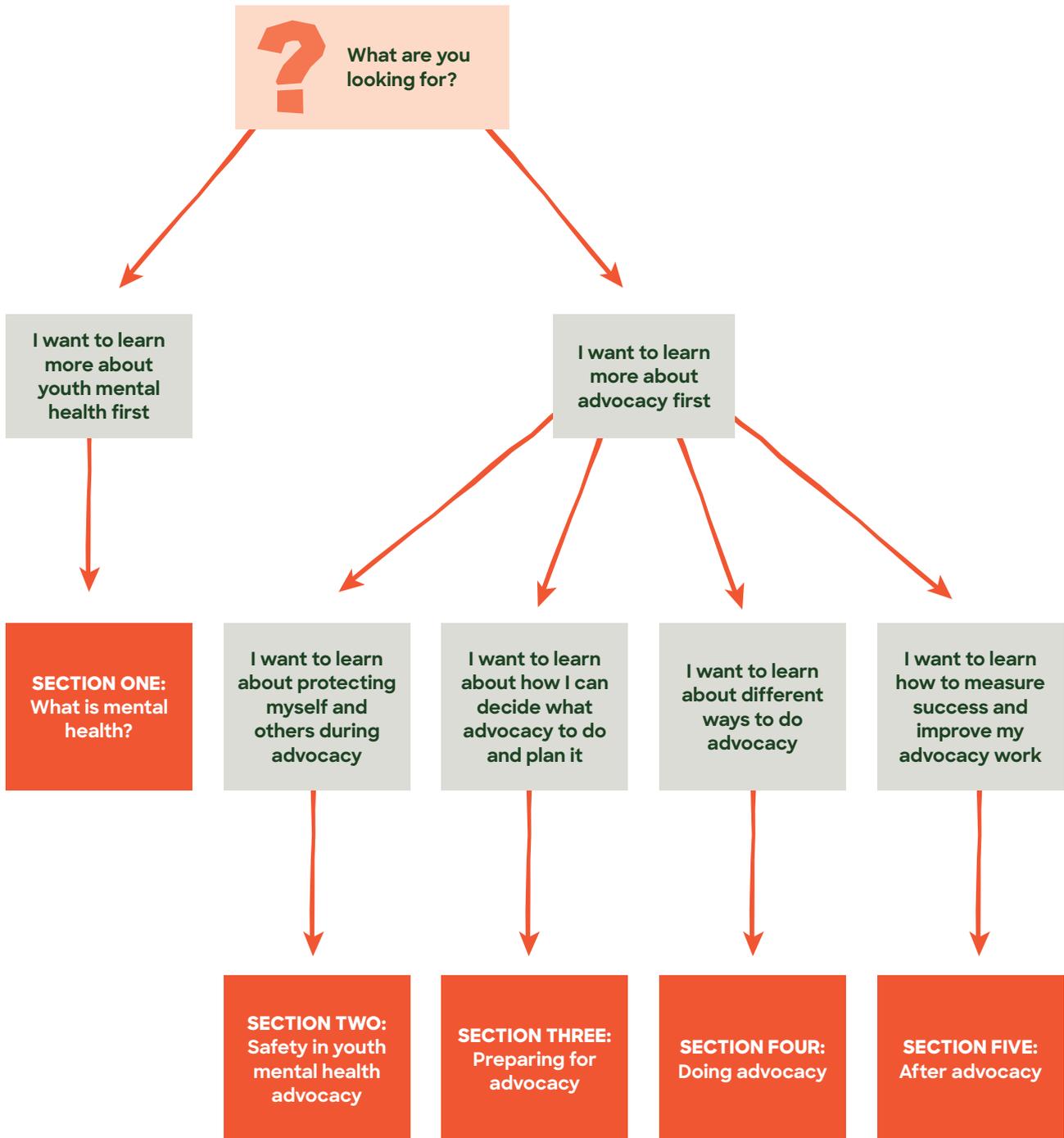
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## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to give you the information and tools you need in advocating for youth mental health. You don't have to read the whole document, or even a whole section. You may just want a bit of information on a really specific topic, like how to run a social media campaign, and if that's the case, you can jump straight to that section. Below is a quick tool to help you work out where to start. Once you follow one of the links to a section, you can then follow further links to specific sub-sections that you are interested in. So, if you want to learn about social media campaigns, you would click on the link for section four: Doing advocacy, and then click on the link to the subsection called Using social and digital media for advocacy.



## INTRODUCTION

Youth mental health is a significant global issue that needs local, national and international action.

A significant proportion of young people (aged 12-25-years-old) around the world are experiencing poor mental health. One in two young people under the age of 25 will experience mental ill-health at some point, and 75 per cent of mental illnesses begin before the age of 25.<sup>1</sup> Many do not have access to the services they need and the true prevalence and impact of youth mental ill-health is still not widely recognised.

This resource provides information for individuals and organisations around the world to communicate with their community leaders about the importance of prioritising and delivering of affordable, accessible and effective mental health care for young people in their country. This resource has been developed for and by young people, but can be used by anyone interested in advocating for better mental health care, including people who have never been involved in advocacy before, as well as more experienced advocates.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'ADVOCACY'?

Advocacy can mean a lot of different things in different situations. In mental health, advocacy is sometimes used to describe a situation where a person experiencing mental ill-health gets support from someone to get the best care possible or make sure they are being treated fairly. This is very important work, but is not the focus of this toolkit.

In this toolkit, advocacy means the process of creating positive change in mental health systems, such as new services and programs and improving existing services, by influencing decision-makers in a community.

The resource is divided into five main sections.

**Section one: What is mental health?** This includes definitions and helpful information about what leads young people to experience mental ill-health and how this can impact on their lives, now and into the future. This section also discusses the global impacts of mental ill-health, and how you can find out more information about mental health specific to your community and country.

**Section two: Safety in youth mental health advocacy.** Advocacy is important work, particularly when the focus is on a crucial issue like youth mental health, but the most important thing in any advocacy work is looking after yourself and those you are working with. This section provides some information about how you can keep yourself and those involved in your advocacy efforts safe and well as you do your work.

**Section three: Preparing for advocacy.** This includes information and resources to help you understand your advocacy skills and strengths and guidance on either starting your own advocacy project or joining in on others' efforts and campaigns. This section provides information on how you can plan your advocacy project, including setting goals, creating a proposal for change, tailoring your messaging and identifying key stakeholders.

**Section four: Doing advocacy.** This section provides a range of activities, tools and resources you can use to create action on your issue, including how to engage with government and community leaders, use traditional and social media to draw attention to your work, and create public support for your issue.

**Section five: After advocacy.** This section provides tools for measuring the impact of your advocacy work, making use of the plan, do, act, reflect cycle.

This resource was developed by Orygen, an Australian youth mental health organisation, with young people co-designing and developing the content. It is part of the Global Youth Mental Health Framework Partnership project between Orygen and the World Economic Forum. The aim of this project was to develop a framework for youth mental health care that could be delivered in all countries around the world and an advocacy toolkit to support young people and communities make the case, locally, nationally and globally, for investing in young people's mental health. The project has involved extensive consultation with youth mental health stakeholders; namely young people and their families, as well as the services providers and planners, clinicians, non-government organisations (NGOs), government, and researchers who are dedicated to system development and reform to better meet the mental health needs of young people. These perspectives are also included in this resource.



**SECTION ONE: WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?**



## SECTION ONE: WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is increasingly being talked about around the world and there has been significant work undertaken to raise awareness and understanding of mental illness. However, not all cultures and countries speak about mental health issues the same way, and in some languages there is not a direct translation for mental health or mental illness.

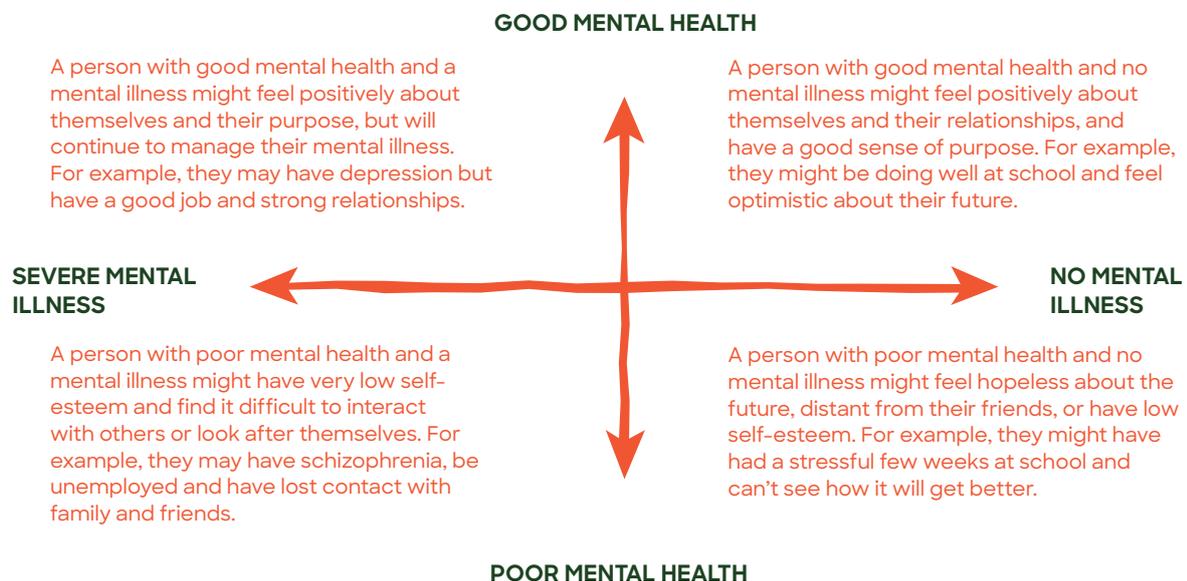
This section describes:

- an overview of some common ways we can describe experiences of mental health;
- a snapshot of youth mental health globally;
- factors that can support good mental health or lead to poor mental health;
- barriers for young people to access care and support for their mental health;
- impacts of poor mental health; and
- how you can find out more about youth mental health where you live.

### MENTAL HEALTH EXPLAINED

When people think about mental health, they often think about mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety or schizophrenia, but mental health or mental ill-health is more than that.

A person's mental health is how they feel, think and behave. Someone can be mentally healthy, have a mental illness, or be somewhere in between. People living with mental health conditions may recover and have moments of good mental health, while people without mental health diagnoses may also experience times of poor mental health.<sup>2</sup> One way to think about this is that mental health is across a spectrum (see the image below).



The line in the spectrum that goes from top to bottom shows a person's mental health. A person sitting at the top would have 'good mental health', which is a state that allows us to reach our potential, to cope with the stresses of life, and to operate as part of a productive community. A person sitting at the bottom would have 'poor mental health' which is a state in which there are continuing negative effects to our thoughts, feelings or behaviours.

The line in the spectrum that goes from left to right shows if a person has a mental illness or not. A person sitting on the far left would have a severe mental illness, while a person sitting closer to the middle on the left would have a mild mental illness. A person sitting on the far right would have no mental illness, while a person sitting closer to the middle on the right might have some risk factors for a mental illness, such as a previous mental illness or a chronic medical condition like diabetes.

A person can move along both of these lines at different times. In each corner of the spectrum, you can see an example of the mental health of a person sitting in the area.

Mental health is not only defined by the ends of the spectrums - there are a lot of possible states along the spectrum. At different points in life, individuals will have varying experiences of mental health or severity of illness. There are many factors (biological, psychological, social and environmental) that affect where someone generally sits on the spectrum, and which also affect where they sit at any given point in time. One factor on its own is generally not enough to result in a period of mental ill-health or mental illness, but a combination of factors together can change our mental health and wellbeing at a point in time.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, good mental health is not just the absence of a mental health condition.

#### KEY TERMS

**Mental health:** how a person is feeling, thinking and behaving. Someone can have good or poor mental health, as well as something in between.

**Mental illness:** mental health problems diagnosed by doctors, such as depression or schizophrenia. Also called mental disorders or mental conditions.

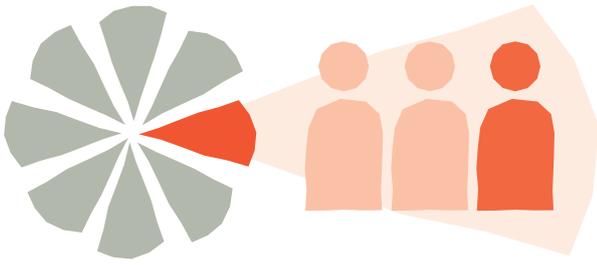
**Mental ill-health:** when someone is not experiencing good mental health. They might have a mental illness, or they might have poor mental health without having an illness. This term includes anyone who is experiencing mental health challenges.

#### REFLECTION ACTIVITY ONE

How do you define mental health and mental ill-health? Take a moment to describe them in definitions in your own words.



## YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH GLOBALLY



Around one in eight people in the world have a mental illness,<sup>4</sup> but only around one in three of these people are able to seek professional help.<sup>5</sup> One of the results of this is that around the world, more than 800,000 people die by suicide each year.<sup>6</sup>

75 per cent of mental illnesses begin before the age of 25, which has a big impact on a young person's development and their ability to live well and

contribute to their community. Mental illness is the leading cause of disability in young people globally.<sup>7</sup> This period of time is also during a critical transition period for youth. Despite this, there are often not many services available for young people, even in communities with a lot of resources. Providing young people with access to good mental health care is considered a human right by most countries.<sup>8</sup> However, around one in three countries have no mental health policy<sup>9</sup> and most countries spend less than two per cent of their health budget on mental health.<sup>10</sup>

It is important that communities provide young people with services that are supported by evidence and try to help young people before they experience mental ill-health (this is known as prevention or early intervention), otherwise young people will face significant challenges later in life and communities will react by spending a lot of resources in supporting them.

FIGURE 1: Proportion of population aged 15-24, 2020 (darker colours indicate higher proportion of young people per population)

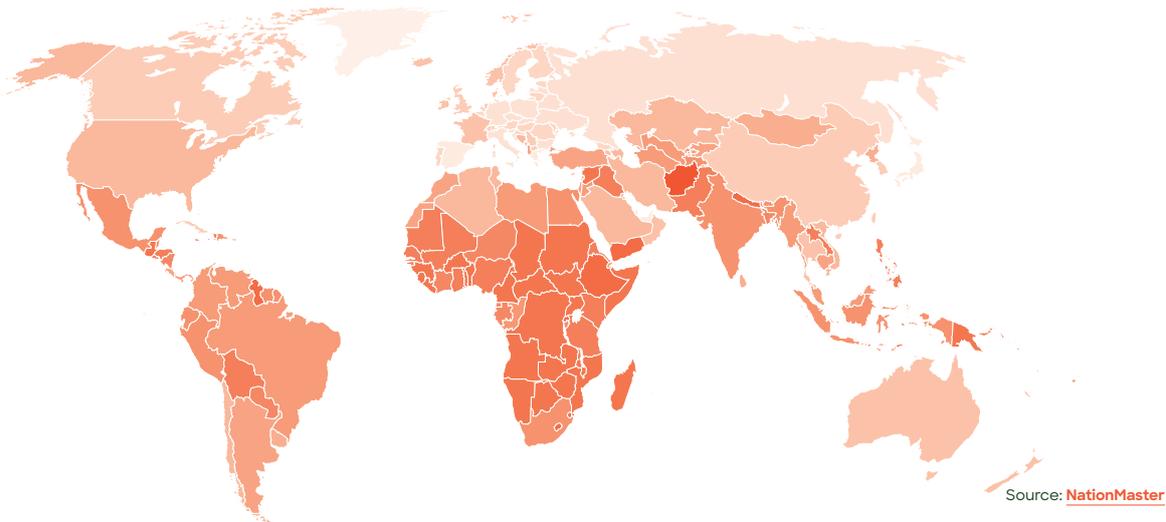
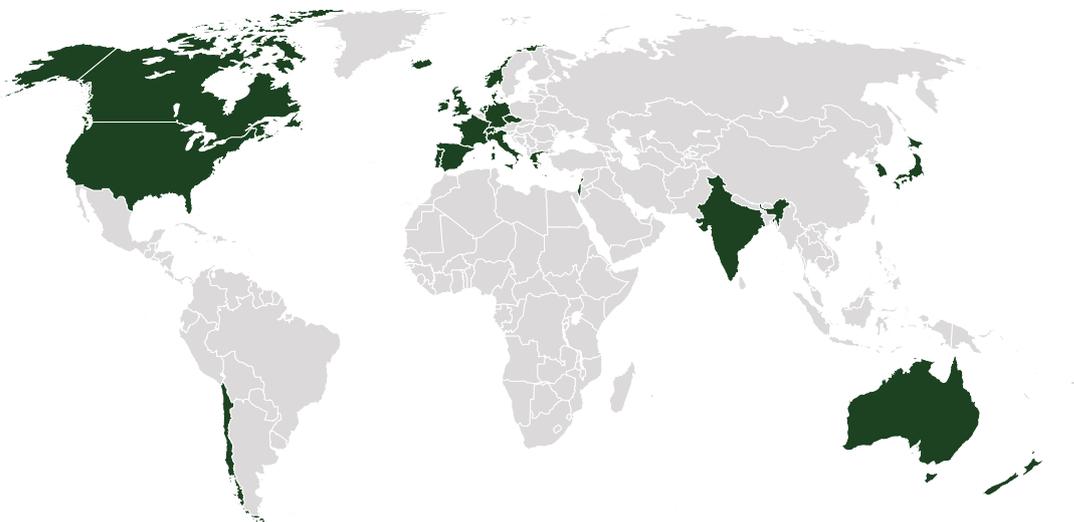


FIGURE 2: Countries where there are youth mental health service models identified in the project



## WHAT AFFECTS YOUNG PEOPLES' MENTAL HEALTH?

There are a wide range of factors which impact a young person's mental health. Factors which can help a young person to maintain a mentally well state are called 'protective factors'. On the other hand, 'risk factors' can increase the likelihood a young

person will experience a mental illness, or can make an existing mental illness worse. The table below outlines some examples of both protective and risk factors for young people. The more we are aware of those factors, the more chance that there is of responding to mental ill-health.<sup>11</sup>

	Protective factors	Risk factors
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive physical and emotional development</li> <li>Doing well at school or work</li> <li>High self-esteem</li> <li>Good coping and problem-solving skills</li> <li>Looking forward to the future</li> <li>(For young adults) Financial independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being unhappy</li> <li>Low self-confidence</li> <li>Alcohol and drug use</li> <li>Poor physical health</li> <li>Sleep and eating problems</li> <li>Avoiding friends and family</li> </ul>
<b>Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive relationships with family members</li> <li>Balance of freedom and closeness to family</li> <li>Emotional independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arguments with family</li> <li>Out-of-home care</li> <li>Caregiver alcohol or drug use</li> <li>Poor parenting or supervision</li> <li>Abuse/maltreatment</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other people helping to develop skills</li> <li>Physical and psychological safety</li> <li>Opportunities for exploration in work or study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traumatic or stressful events</li> <li>Community violence</li> <li>Poverty</li> <li>Losing friends and family</li> </ul>

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY TWO

Take a moment to think about two-three protective and risk factors for mental health that you might experience in your life. Write them down if you feel comfortable.



## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH?

Despite the significant impacts that mental ill-health can have, there are often a range of structural, social and personal barriers which can stop a young person from accessing services and assistance.

Structural barriers can include:

- governments not supporting youth mental health and not providing funding to youth mental health services;
- decision-makers don't know enough about youth issues and youth mental health;
- decision-makers not giving enough consideration to young people and their views;
- young people and communities not having enough time or resources to advocate for the importance of youth mental health;
- availability of services/waiting lists (do they exist and are there enough?);
- awareness of services (do people know services are available to them?);
- costs (are they too expensive?); and
- service limitations (where you live or your age means you are not eligible for some services).

Social barriers can include:

- a lack of social support (loss of friends and family);
- poor motivation (not wanting to treat mental ill-health); and
- stigma/shame around help-seeking (this could be real stigma, i.e. other people judging those who address mental health or 'perceived' stigma, that is a person feel like others will judge them, even if they aren't).

Despite the barriers that can prevent young people from seeking assistance, if services are accessible, young people will use them. There are some key aspects that can improve uptake of services by young people:

- youth-specific agencies which tailor services for young people experiencing mental ill-health;
- information/support from close connections, such as from family, friends and peers; and
- accessibility (e.g. through flexible entry criteria, after-hours availability, and/or close to public transport).

Ultimately, the best way to ensure young people can access the services they need is to involve them in their design and development.

To find out more about the barriers to addressing mental health and how we can overcome them, see the [Global Youth Mental Health Framework](#) which has been developed alongside this toolkit. The framework has a lot of information about why it is important for decision-makers to invest in youth mental health services that you can use in your advocacy work, as well as information to help community leaders design good youth mental health services and systems.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY THREE

Take a moment to think about mental health services in your community. Are they as good as they can be? If not, why not? What barriers are stopping people in your community from getting the mental health support they need?



## IMPACTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY FOUR

Before you read this section, take a moment to think about some of the ways that mental health could impact someone's life.

Mental illnesses can have a significant impact not only on the health and well-being of those young people affected but also of their families, friends and the communities they live in.

The impact will be different for everyone depending on the type and severity of the mental illness experienced. However, people who live with a mental illness are at risk of experiencing a range of adverse outcomes, including:

- **Shorter life expectancy.** People with more severe mental ill-health, such as a psychotic disorder, will have a shorter life expectancy, as their condition will make it much harder to look after their physical health.<sup>12</sup>
- **Discrimination** and exclusion from social, housing, education, employment and even health systems.<sup>13</sup>
- **Work or education challenges.** Having a mental health condition reduced the likelihood of starting and maintaining work or education.<sup>14</sup>
- **Homelessness.** Mental ill-health has been found to be a contributing factor to as many as one-third of young peoples' experiences of homelessness.<sup>15</sup>
- **Imprisonment.** A significant amount of people who go to prison have serious mental health conditions.<sup>16</sup>
- **Increased risk of suicide or self-harm.** Suicide is the third leading cause of death amongst young people.<sup>17</sup>
- **Addiction.** Young people experiencing mental ill-health have increased rates of alcohol and drug addiction.<sup>18</sup>
- **Family and social challenges.** Mental ill-health can also affect family relationships and social connections, which may isolate the young person from potential sources of support. Sometimes this cycle of difficult family and social interactions leads to social isolation which can result in even poorer mental health.

## YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Every community, region and country is different in its understanding of youth mental health issues and in its response. To explore what is happening in your community you can find out:

- If there is a youth mental health policy or strategy (this will usually be something a government or non-government organisation has developed and might be for a local or regional level or an entire state or country). The [Advocating for Change for Adolescents toolkit](#)<sup>19</sup> can help you work this out, particularly the tool on page 39.
- If there are any groups advocating for youth mental health in your area. The tool on page 28 of the [Advocating for Change for Adolescents toolkit](#)<sup>20</sup> can help you work this out.
- What help young people in your area can get if they are experiencing mental ill-health, and if more help is needed, or if this help can be improved.

There are many different tools you can use to find out about these things. Below are a few suggestions to get you started:

- **The internet.** If you have access to the internet, this will be a very helpful way to find information. A great place to start is the World Health Organization's MiNDbank, which provides mental health information on most countries in the world, including all the mental health policies, strategies and plans their governments have published. Other good things to search for on the internet include:
  - > Local government youth and health pages.
  - > Advocacy and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on youth, health or mental health issues.
- **The library.** If you don't have internet access, your local library is a great alternative. Your library may have government records with mental health policies, annual reports from mental health NGOs, and media stories about mental health. Ask your librarian to help you search.
- **Talk to informed people.** One of the best ways to find out what is currently happening in your community is to ask informed people. This could be done formally (for example, writing to your local politician, community leader or someone from a mental health NGO) or informally (for example, speaking with friends or family who work in health jobs).



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**SECTION TWO:  
SAFETY IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY**

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## SECTION TWO: SAFETY IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

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Thinking about your safety, and the safety of those you are working with, is very important in youth mental health advocacy. Depending on the type of advocacy you do, you will need to prepare to face some challenges in your work.

This section provides information on:

- lived experience in advocacy (a person's own experience of living with mental ill-health); and
- looking after yourself, including your safety, and your mental and physical health.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY FIVE

Mental health advocacy can be vulnerable work. As you read this section think about the possible challenges you might face in your advocacy, how you might look after yourself, and what you can do to protect your personal safety.

### LIVED EXPERIENCE IN ADVOCACY

Young people with lived experience of mental ill-health hold a unique insight into the world of mental healthcare. A lived experience voice also increases community understanding of the impacts of mental ill-health.

Lived experience roles have been shown to improve outcomes for people using mental health services. People with a personal lived experience can:

- design and develop policies, program and services that meet the needs of other people experiencing mental ill-health;
- understand and advocate on behalf of others without a voice, including those individuals who will experience mental ill-health and/or mental illness in future; and
- help protect the human rights of consumers.

Most importantly, if people with lived experience who are on a path to recovery are visible in advocacy roles, then it provides a sense of hope and empowerment for others who are currently experiencing mental ill-health.

Lived experience advocacy can include participation in a broad range of ways. It can be paid or voluntary but specifically requires a perspective informed by a personal experience of mental illness and healing.

### SHARING LIVED EXPERIENCE SAFELY

If you have lived experience of mental ill-health personally, or as a carer or family member, it will be important to think about how much information you are comfortable sharing about your experience. For example, sharing personal details about yourself with other people can have a big impact, inspiring others to speak out and do advocacy. But you should be aware that people can use this sensitive information against you. People may also react differently to the information you share, so you may have to consider the audience you are sharing with. If you do not want to tell your story publicly, or you are happy for your story to be shared but you don't want to be identified, you should make sure that the people you are working with understand this. If you do want to tell your story, it is important to consider how you tell it. [This resource from Jack.Org](#)<sup>21</sup> is helpful in telling your story and [this free online course from Advocacy Assembly](#)<sup>22</sup> can help you do so safely.

If you do not have lived experience of mental ill-health, you will need to consider the ways in which you talk about mental ill-health to make sure that your audience feels comfortable and that you are sharing other people's stories responsibly. For example, you may share the stories of others who have already shared their stories publicly, such as those on the [Speak Your Mind website](#).

### LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Being an advocate for youth mental health can be amazing. You have the chance to give a voice to those who need it. However, there can be challenges to being an advocate. You may face criticism for your advocacy and discrimination from others. Because advocacy can be quite a long and difficult process, there may also be times when you feel physically or emotionally exhausted.

Whether or not you have lived experience of mental ill-health, there are a number of other safety considerations to think about. This toolkit contains some tips below on how you can care for yourself. Not all of the tips may be relevant for you, and there are always other options.

## TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



### PERSONAL SAFETY AND PRIVACY

**Keep your digital world protected.** If possible, keep your computer, phone and sensitive documents (like contact lists and phone trees) password-protected. If leaving an internet café, make sure that you have signed out of and closed all email and social media accounts. [These free videos by Advocacy Assembly](#)<sup>23</sup> provide ideas for thinking about safety in advocacy, especially online.

**Do not reveal personal information on social media.** Remember that supporters and non-supporters might be following you on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Be careful not to reveal any private information (i.e. cell phone numbers or home addresses) that could put you at risk. [These free videos by Advocacy Assembly](#)<sup>24</sup> provide ideas for thinking about safety in advocacy, especially online.

**Be aware of discrimination and how to respond.** During your advocacy, you may face discrimination based on your gender, sexuality, religion or many other personal factors, so it is important to know how to respond to these challenges. The online [Dealing with Discrimination guide](#) developed by Kids Helpline<sup>25</sup> has some simple ways for you to respond to discrimination. You can also search the internet or ask people in your community to find local organisations or resources that can help you respond to discrimination.



### MENTAL HEALTH

**Avoid burning out.** Youth mental health advocacy can take a long time to be successful and can impact your own mental health. It is important that you look after yourself by taking a break and having a strong support team around you, which will help to [avoid burning out](#), or getting overwhelmed. Talk to other advocates about how you are feeling – they will understand what you are going through and might have some good advice on how to look after yourself. [This online resource developed by HelpGuide.org](#)<sup>26</sup> has some helpful advice on avoiding burning out.

**Do other things that make you happy.** Spend time with people who you care about. Make sure to allow time for enjoyable activities – this can be listening to music, keeping a journal, dancing, cooking, or anything that you find relaxing and rewarding.

**Separate your advocacy work from your personal life.** Whilst it can be hard, try not to think about your advocacy work when you are away from it.



### PHYSICAL HEALTH

**Keep yourself active.** Exercise will help you feel more energised and mentally sharp.

**Eat healthy meals throughout your day.** Try not to skip meals, and take your time to enjoy them. Snack often – carry fruits or nuts in your bag for when you need an extra boost of energy. Also try to drink lots of water – you should aim to have 6-8 glasses each day. [This online Eat Well guide](#)<sup>27</sup> developed by the UK National Health Service has some helpful information about eating well.

**A good night's sleep.** Having around seven to nine hours sleep a night will help you concentrate and process information.



**SECTION THREE: PREPARING FOR ADVOCACY**



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## SECTION THREE: PREPARING FOR ADVOCACY

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Doing some planning and preparation before you start your advocacy is very important, as it will help you decide what work is most needed, what work you are able to do, and the best way to approach this work. It will also save you time in the future and give you a better chance of succeeding.

This section provides information, resources and practical tools to help you:

- understand what is meant by advocacy;
- build skills for advocacy;
- consider whether to start your own action or get involved in others campaigns;
- plan your advocacy;
- develop a strategy;
- define the goals;
- identify stakeholders; and
- develop key messages.

### WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy can mean a lot of different things in different situations.

Advocacy can mean the process of creating positive change in mental health systems, such as new services and programs and improving existing services, by influencing decision-makers in a community.

There are also mental health advocates that work with and support individuals where there may be specific issues or concerns with the treatment and care they are receiving. They help people understand their rights and make complaints where they feel their rights have been infringed.

This toolkit focuses on the first type of advocacy.

### WHAT ARE ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES?

There are many different activities you can do when undertaking advocacy. Section eight describes all of these in detail, but a few of the main things advocates can do are:

- Influencing decision-makers: convincing government or community leaders to support a cause through activities such as meetings, letters and policy submissions.

### ADVOCACY OR DIRECT SUPPORT?

It is important to understand that helping an individual person recover from their mental ill-health is not advocacy, but providing direct mental health care or support (whether it is paid or unpaid). If there are no other mental health services available or accessible in your community, providing direct mental health care or support can be very helpful for individuals who are having difficulties with their mental health.

However, if you intend to start your own mental health care or support program, then it is important to first try to get government or community leaders to understand the full extent of the mental health need in your community. This way, the need doesn't remain invisible to them, meaning you and the community can get the right amount of resources required to respond. Advocacy like this is very effective because it makes sure that community leaders understand how large a problem is, convincing them to commit a lot of resources to addressing it, meaning more people can benefit.

This toolkit is focused on advocacy. If you are interested in delivering direct mental health care or support, you will need specific training, skills and resources. You will also need to think very carefully about how you safely provide services, otherwise you may unintentionally cause harm to those you want to help. [A good place to start is this mental health community toolkit from the World Health Organization](#) (particularly modules three and four).

- Raising public awareness: getting the public to support a cause through activities such as publishing media articles, running public events and holding protests.
- Direct action: creating immediate change through activities such as strikes or legal action.

### HOW DOES ADVOCACY ACHIEVE CHANGE?

Advocacy can achieve change in different ways. Influencing decision-makers can get people such as politicians to change their views on issues which then leads to policy change. Raising public awareness can put pressure on politicians as well as convince people

to change the way they behave. And direct action can lead to changes in laws or the actions of big organisations.

It is important that advocacy campaigns are informed by the experiences and perspectives of those they are trying to help (the beneficiaries). If they are not, advocacy can become misguided, so that the change being created is not in the interests of the beneficiaries. In youth mental health advocacy, this is particularly important, as young people have unique experiences compared with adults and children, and require very specific and often complex support.

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY SIX

Throughout this toolkit, we will use advocacy examples to help understand what advocacy is and how to do it well. Take a moment to think about an advocacy project that has happened in your community, or somewhere else in the world (if you can't think of one, you can use one of the examples below, or even use your own advocacy project or idea). Find out a little bit about the project – what are their goals? How are they trying to achieve them? How successful have they been? Using an example to understand the ideas, skills and resources in this toolkit will be really helpful.

## YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY EXAMPLES

To give you an idea of some of the projects that are happening in the world that you might be able to help out with, here are a few examples of youth mental health advocates around the world:

### Sitawa Wafula | KENYA

After being unable to access services for the epilepsy and bipolar disorder she experienced, Sitawa started a blog, [My Mind, My Funk](#), and [podcast of the same name](#) to start conversations about mental health in the community. The award-winning blog has seen Sitawa invited to speak about mental health on the [TED stage](#) and at the UN General Assembly, using her story to educate and inspire action on mental health issues.

### Melquiades Huauya Ore | PERU

Melquiades' journey to recovery from tuberculosis was made possible with the help of a community mental health worker. Since his recovery, Melquiades has spoken about his experiences with the United Nations, the United States Government and other important groups to make sure that all people experiencing life-threatening diseases have access to mental health support. His work has resulted in mental health support being a key part in the United Nations Political Declaration on Tuberculosis.

### Nawira Baig | SINGAPORE

Having past mental ill-health experience, Nawira advocates wellness for individuals, organisations and nations. She has 12 years of experience in mental health advocacy, including as youth ambassador, expert speaker, panellist, writer, project advisor and board member, and works at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). She also undertakes advocacy as [CHAT: Centre for Youth Mental Health](#) Ambassador through social media campaigns and public outreach, and works with the Singapore Government on their [Beyond The Label](#) campaign. Leveraging a communications background, she brings forth 'voices unheard' to create innovative and sustainable solutions. Her current pursuit is psychology specialisation in Health, Performance and Well-being.

## ADVOCACY SKILLS

### WHAT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE ARE NEEDED FOR ADVOCACY?

There are a lot of different things that go into successful advocacy. This means that advocacy often requires diverse sets of skills and experiences. Using the above examples of advocacy activities, here are just a few of the skills you might need:

- **Influencing decision-makers.** Main skills and experience needed: communication skills, understanding of how government and politics work, relationship building and negotiation.
- **Public campaigning.** Main skills and experience needed: marketing and communications, social and traditional media knowledge and understanding how to generate public interest.
- **Organising a strike.** Main skills and experience needed: community organising, public safety, event planning and promotions.

As part of your education, work or life experiences, you probably have already developed many of the skills needed to do advocacy. Work through the next section to understand what advocacy activities might be suitable for you.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY SEVEN

Before you do the activity below, think about some of the skills you have learned in your life that might apply to advocacy. They don't have to be work skills either. For example, if you have ever helped to organise an event with your friends or family or at school, you would have some skills for community organising. Or if you are an active social media user, you probably have some of the skills needed to run a social media campaign.

### UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLORING YOUR ADVOCACY EXPERIENCE

Understanding your advocacy experience and skills can be helpful in planning your first steps in youth mental health advocacy. Below are some simple questions to help identify your advocacy capabilities.

Have you ever spoken or written about a social issue with people in your community?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Do you know who your community and national leaders are?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Have you ever contacted or met with a community leader about a social issue?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Have you organised a group or event in your community before?	✓ Yes	✗ No
Have you been the leader of an organised campaign on a social issue before?	✓ Yes	✗ No

Based on your answers, you will now have an initial sense of how advanced your advocacy skills are. As a guide, if you answered yes to:

- 0-1 questions, you probably have just started your advocacy journey, so it might be best to join others in their advocacy work or create an advocacy strategy that is less demanding;
- 2-3 questions, you probably have done some advocacy before, so you might be able to get started on your own and plan an advocacy strategy that uses some more time-intensive activities; or
- 4-5 questions, you have obviously done some advocacy before and should be able to use all of the activities in this toolkit to create an engaging advocacy project.

## CREATE OR JOIN

### WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Now that you have an idea of what advocacy is and some of the things you can do, you might be deciding if you should start your own advocacy project or join one that's already happening. Using the information on [page 12](#) and this tool, you will be able to find out what advocacy work is already happening in your area.

### SHOULD I START MY OWN ADVOCACY WORK OR JOIN AN EXISTING PROJECT?

This decision is a very important one. There are many factors you need to consider. For example, starting your own project will be very time intensive, but it also may be much needed in your community. We've developed a quick tool below that can guide you in making this decision.

Questions	Rating scale	Your score
How much time do you intend to dedicate to your advocacy work per week?	1 = one hour or less 2 = 1-3 hours 3 = 3-10 hours 4 = 10-20 hours 5 = 20+ hours	
How much experience do you have in undertaking advocacy?	Use your score from the understanding and exploring advocacy checklist on <a href="#">page 19</a> .	
How much knowledge of the mental health system do you have?	1 = I don't know much at all. 2 = I have a small understanding about services in my area. 3 = I know about services in my area, and have a small understanding of mental health and how care is provided. 4 = I have a good understanding of what mental health care is being provided in my community, and I know a bit about what regional/national mental health policies we have. 5 = I know a lot about both mental health in my community and regional/national policies and strategies.	
<b>CAPACITY TOTAL</b>	Add up your scores from questions 1-3	
Is the work you are considering already being done in your community?	1 = yes, there are established groups doing this work that need help. 2 = yes, but there are gaps in the work that groups are doing and they are not well-established. 3 = I'm not sure. There are some groups doing this work but it seems like more could be done. 4 = No, there is not a lot of work being done in this area and it is hard to know how to get involved. 5 = No, I have not met anyone doing this work.	
Are there international groups you could contact who could help you do this work?	1 = yes, the advocacy I plan could be easily supported by an international NGO. 2 = yes, the advocacy I plan could be supported, but it does also need some local knowledge to make it relevant. 3 = I'm not sure. International NGOs might be able to help out, but this work needs to be led by someone in the community. 4 = Not really. This work is quite specific to my community, and there are only small ways that international NGOs can help. 5 = No, this work is very specific to my community and must be completely led by someone who knows it well.	
<b>SUPPORT TOTAL</b>	Add up your scores from questions 4-5	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	Add up your capacity total and support total	

Using your grand total score:

- If you scored 10 or below, it is probably going to be very difficult and not very helpful for you to start your own advocacy project. It might be best to get in contact with groups working in your community and help them out.
- If you scored between 11-15, you might find that starting your own advocacy project is achievable and helpful for your community, but it also might be better to work with an existing project. You should do some more research before you start.
- If you scored 16-20, there's a good chance you have the capabilities to start your own project and that your community needs it. But it might be best to contact any local or international groups doing this work to see if you can help them first.
- If you scored 21 or more, there's a very good chance you should start your own advocacy project. You should still try to contact existing advocacy groups, but it is likely you will need to be a leader in your area.

## HOW TO JOIN OTHERS

If you decide that you would like to join in with the advocacy work of others, there are a number of ways you can get involved. For example, if you only have a small amount of time to help out, you might do so indirectly by sharing social media posts or attending an advocacy event or protest. If you have more time, you might contact an organisation and ask them if you could volunteer or work with them. It is good to be clear from the beginning what time you are able to commit and what activities you are most comfortable participating in.

The best way to get started is to find out some information about what advocacy is being done in your local area and by who, then contacting them to find out. See [page 12](#) to learn more about finding out information in your local area.

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION

As a young person, you will have a lot to offer a youth mental health advocacy project, but sometimes it can be difficult for others to understand that and involve you in their work. Youth participation is the process of including young people as partners in a project, and is a great way for young people to work with others effectively. There are many different ways to do youth participation, but one great way is to join or create a youth advisory council (YAC). YACs are groups of young people who provide their advice and perspectives to an organisation to shape how that organisation works. In youth mental health, YACs are often used to ensure young people's ideas are part of the design of youth mental services, health centres, and the system in general.

Read more about youth participation in [this Youth Engagement Toolkit](#)<sup>28</sup> developed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, which also includes some tips on creating a YAC so you can pass it onto people in your community to understand better.



## PLANNING YOUR ADVOCACY

### WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT?

So you've decided to become involved in youth mental health advocacy? Great! Now it's time to make some plans. Planning is very important for a number of reasons, including:

- **Safety.** Advocacy is often done in public and involves opposing interests, so it's important to know how you will ensure your safety, and those you are working with, particularly if there is a chance people may react negatively to your work.
- **Guiding your work.** Without good planning, it is hard to know what advocacy work is needed to improve youth mental health in your community. Doing some research will show you what work you should do and setting good goals will provide you with the focus you need to achieve change.
- **Using resources effectively.** Planning can provide you with information you need to avoid obstacles and take advantage of opportunities you might otherwise have missed, which means you can make sure you are not wasting precious resources like your time.
- **Measuring success and learning.** Setting goals will also allow you to look back on your work, check if you have been successful against your targets, and either increase your targets if you are successful or change your approach if you're not.

### GOAL SETTING

Setting goals is one of the most important parts of your advocacy planning, and often is the first thing you should do once you have an idea of the work that needs to be done in your community. Your goals will be short statements of what you plan to achieve in a given timeframe.

One commonly used method for setting goals is using the **SMART** process, which describes goals that are:

- **S-Specific**, talking clearly about what your work will achieve.
- **M-Measurable**, so that you are able to tell if you achieved them or not.
- **A-Achievable**, meaning they are not unrealistically ambitious.
- **R-Relevant**, ensuring that the work you are doing relates to your mission.
- **T-Time bound**, so that you have a deadline to work towards and can assess your progress.

So a good goal might be: "We will get \$5,000 funding for a local youth mental health centre within two years." It is specific (getting funding for a youth mental health centre), measurable (\$5,000), achievable (it can be done in that timeframe), relevant (working towards youth mental health services), and time bound (within two years).

And one that is not as good would be: "We will get a lot of funding for health in our country."

For some more information on setting goals, you can use [this online resource from Jack.org](#)<sup>29</sup> and [this one from the Community Tool Box](#).<sup>30</sup>

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY EIGHT

Take a moment to think about an advocacy example (see reflection activity six for more information).

For your example, think about what why planning would have been/will be important. What would have happened if they had not have planned well, or what are some of the things you need to consider as you start planning?

Then, think about some of the goals that might be relevant for your example. Write down 1-2 SMART goals they might have used or that you might use.

### ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Once you have set your goals, it's now time to think about how you will achieve them – your advocacy strategy. For example, if you are trying to get funding for a youth mental health centre in your community, how will you get this funding? Will you go straight to your local leaders and ask for it, or do you need more community support first? Is it better to try to get media attention or run a social media campaign? The answers to these questions will depend on a number of factors. Some of the most important factors you will need to consider are discussed here.

### RESOURCES

Your resources are anything you have that can help you in your advocacy work, and can include things like your time, friends, family and colleagues who are willing to help, money, facilities (e.g. meeting rooms) and connectivity (e.g. internet access). Understanding the amount and type of resources you have access to will help shape your advocacy strategy.

For example, if you have a lot of people willing to help but don't have internet access or a lot of resources, a good advocacy strategy might be asking people in the community to sign a petition telling your community leaders to invest in a youth mental health centre.

### TARGET AUDIENCE

A target audience is the group of people that your advocacy efforts are focused on. You can have different target audiences for different parts of your advocacy. For example, you might want community leaders to fund your youth centre, but first you may need the support of parents of young people in your

community to convince the leaders that the youth centre is a good idea.

So parents would be your target audience in the short term, and community leaders in the long term. Your target audiences will be important in deciding your advocacy strategy, as different groups like getting their information in different ways. You might write formal letters to your community leaders, but for parents and young people in the community, having an informal conversation on the street or sharing social media content with them may be more effective.

## OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

All advocacy work will face obstacles. Perhaps the local government has other priorities, or the community does not yet understand the importance of youth mental health, or maybe there are groups in your community that think your approach is not the best way to address the issue. On the other hand, there may also be opportunities you can use to your advantage, such as a community leader who has lived experience with mental ill-health and wants to see increased services. Depending on the obstacles you face and opportunities available, you will need to choose the right strategy to overcome and take advantage of them.

As you move through this toolkit, [you can use a simple advocacy strategy template such as this one](#)<sup>31</sup> developed by the World Health Organization to start creating your strategy.

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY NINE

Using an example of advocacy (see reflection activity six for more information), think about some of the resources, audiences, obstacles and opportunities that might be involved in that advocacy project.



## THE PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

To convince people that your issue needs to be addressed, it is important to be able to clearly communicate with them two things. Firstly, why that issue should be addressed - this is your case for change. And secondly, how you propose that the issue be addressed - this is your solution. Below is some further information about developing these two important elements of your advocacy project, and combining them into a proposal for change.

### THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Before you start engaging in your advocacy, it is helpful to think about how you will show people that addressing youth mental health challenges is important. People in your community, and especially community leaders, are unlikely to do anything about youth mental health unless they understand the size of the issue. Making a strong case for change will mean that people are more likely to pay attention to the problem you are trying to solve, and listen to your plans for addressing it (your solution).

Your case for change will draw on information about youth mental health (section one) and what's happening in your local area regarding youth mental health ([page 12](#)). You can use statistics, stories, case studies, academic research and other types of evidence to show why your issue is a problem that needs to be addressed. It is important to think about how your issue might pose different problems for different people. For example, if there are no youth mental health services in your community, the problem for young people will be that they are unable to get the support they need. But the lack of services in your community can also mean a problem for community leaders, because young people in their community will not have strong mental health, they are less likely to be happy and contribute to their community. This means the whole community is worse off. It is important to try to shape your message to the target audience. See [page 26](#) for an overview of how to identify the key stakeholders in your community.

### SOLUTION

Once you have considered how you will capture the attention of people in your community, you then need to work out what you will tell them once they are listening. Your solution will explain what actions you think will address the issue, and why they will address the issue. Again, you can use statistics, stories and other evidence to show why your proposed solution will address the issue. For example, to address the lack of youth mental health services in your community, you might propose the building of a youth centre and training of mental health staff, and you might show how this helped a community nearby by using a case study.

## DEVELOPING THE PROPOSAL

Once you have thought about your case for change and solution, you can use the simple template below to start organising your thoughts into a proposal for change. Often when developing your case for change and solution, it is very helpful to present all of your key information on just one page, as any more than this can be overwhelming for people reading it. Try to fill out the following 'Proposal for Change Template' within the word limits so that there is not too much information in your document.

Involving more people from the community in developing your case and proposal for change can be very effective, and if you want to do that, you can use [this easy process](#)<sup>32</sup> developed by the Community Tool Box.

### PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE TEMPLATE

#### TITLE (THE NAME OF YOUR PROJECT OR GROUP)

#### OVERVIEW (25 WORDS)

State your key message. For example, "Our project seeks to address the lack of youth mental health services in the community by proposing the building of a youth centre and training of mental health staff."

#### ISSUE (100 WORDS)

This is your case for change. Describe the problem and use evidence to show why it needs to be addressed.

#### PROPOSAL (100 WORDS)

This is your solution. Explain your proposed solution and why you think it will address the issue effectively.

#### RECOMMENDATION (50 WORDS)

This is where you ask what help you need to implement your solution. For example, if you are presenting this to your local government, you might recommend that they provide an amount of money to help build the youth centre and train mental health staff.

#### ABOUT US (25 WORDS)

Include a quick summary of who you are and provide details for people to contact you if they want to know more.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 10

Using an advocacy example (see reflection activity six for more information), take a moment to think about how you would fill in this tool. If you have a little bit longer, you might even try writing down a small description under each heading.

## MESSAGING

The way that you describe the issue and your proposed solution is your messaging. Messaging is extremely important in advocacy. You might be working on an important issue and have a great idea, but if you can't explain it clearly and in a way that engages your target audience, you might find that no one takes any notice.

Your key messages are the main points that you want to get across to your audience. Normally, you will have one core message, followed by a number of supporting messages. A good key message usually involves a few key things:

- It is easy to understand, using simple, clear language, and avoiding complex or technical words.
- It doesn't use too many words, so people can quickly understand it and will remember it.

- It can be changed for different audiences, focusing on what is important to each audience.

So, for example, a key message for the solution proposed above might be "without youth mental health services, young people cannot thrive in our community."

A good way to develop your key messages is to look through your proposal for change and pick out the three-four main arguments and then re-write them in a short, engaging manner. These key messages should then be at involved in all of the communications you do.

However, as mentioned above, it is important to tailor your messages to each audience you are engaging with. The template below is a helpful way to think about each stakeholder group and tailor your message to them.

Key message	Stakeholder/Group	What is important to them?	What key words might stand out to them?	Re-write key message
"Without youth mental health services, young people cannot thrive in our community."	Parents	Their children's wellbeing	Your children, safety	"Without youth mental health services, your children's safety will be at risk."

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 11

Using an advocacy example (see reflection activity six for more information), think about a key message and two stakeholder groups that will be important in that project. If you have a little bit longer, use the template above to write down a few targeted key messages for each stakeholder group.



## IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

As you develop your case and proposal for change, it is important to understand who is responsible for making decisions and how they are made on a personal, community and national level. You may already have a good idea of who makes decisions and how from your experience of following your community's affairs. If you don't, you can start by using some of the methods on [page 12](#) to find out a bit more about decision-making in your community. Usually the decision-makers in your community will be people like politicians (presidents, prime ministers, secretaries, senators or members of parliament) or community leaders (prominent people in business or other charities, or religious or spiritual leaders). Often there will be some resources in your country or community that tell you who makes what decisions, so you can start by doing an internet search, visiting the local library or asking a community leader.

If you want to get a more detailed understanding of the different people and groups involved in youth mental health in your community and how they act, creating a stakeholder (or actor) map can be very helpful. A stakeholder map is a simple way to record

information about people to show how they feel about your issue, what they can do about it, and how you can engage with them to help you address your issue. Once you have recorded information on some of the key stakeholders in your community, you will start to understand where your resources would best be targeted. For example, if you find out that there are several powerful community leaders who care a lot about mental health, you might focus your efforts on activities that gain their attention. Or if your community leaders are not so interested in mental health, but there are many parents in the community worried about their children's wellbeing, you might try to bring a large group of parents together to raise awareness of the importance of youth mental health in your community.

Below is a helpful template for recording a basic understanding of who is involved in discussions about your issue and how they might be helpful in your work. As you gain more information about stakeholders in your community, you can start to add more sections such as their level of power, who they work with, and how good your relationship with them is.

Stakeholder	Level of knowledge about issue	Level of support for issue	How will our work affect them?	How can they help our work?	How can we engage them?
Community leader	Low	High	Our work will provide them with support and knowledge to raise this issue with other community leaders.	They can be an advocate in the community and amongst leaders for our work. They might even be able to change the local policy about youth mental health.	Because they are very interested in our issue, we should try asking them for a meeting.

There are many other stakeholder templates you can use and many of them are easy to search for on the internet. For example, [this common template](#),<sup>33</sup> developed by The National Council for Voluntary Organisations, focuses on dividing people into categories based on their ability to help you in your work. Another tool related to stakeholder mapping is system mapping, which can help identify the gaps in your community that need to be addressed, giving you a good understanding of how you can help improve mental health care for young people. You can find out more about system mapping in [this simple guide](#),<sup>34</sup> developed by the Human Systems Dynamics Institute, and [this more advanced guide](#),<sup>35</sup> developed by FSG, can help you take it to the next level.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 12

Using an advocacy example (see reflection activity six for more information), think about 1-2 key stakeholders that would be important. If you have a little more time, use the template above to think about how they might fit in to your advocacy example.



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**SECTION FOUR: DOING ADVOCACY**

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## SECTION FOUR: DOING ADVOCACY

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Once you have created a case for change and understand who your audience is, it is time to work out what advocacy activities you will do and how you will do them. Deciding on which activities do undertake will be depend on a number of factors, including the amount of time, resources and experience you have available, what your advocacy goals are, how decisions are made in your community, the influence that media and social media has in your community, and how much attention there is on your issue in your community. If you haven't worked through section three: Preparing for advocacy, this will give you a good understanding of what activities will be more helpful to you. For further information about selecting which activities you should do, take a look at [this website developed by Community Tool Box](#).<sup>36</sup>

This section provides some ideas to help you think about possible activities for your advocacy project. Add the end of each subsection below, you will find a table that suggests activities based on your experience and knowledge of advocacy and mental health, and the amount of time you can commit to your advocacy. Using your capacity score from the activity in section three (page 11), you can use these tables as a guide to show you what activities might be the best to start with.

This section contains information on:

- working with government and community leaders;
- gaining public support, including protests, petitions and events;
- using social and digital media for advocacy; and
- engaging traditional media for advocacy.

### WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Governments, community leaders, politicians and other decision-makers are often the people with the power to turn your advocacy aims into action. They often have control over which services and projects receive funding and which policies to change or create, so it is often important to try and persuade these decision-makers of your advocacy goals. This process is often known as 'influencing' or 'lobbying', although it is called different things in different countries.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 13

As you read this section, reflect on your understanding of influencing decision-makers and how it fits within advocacy examples you can think of (see reflection activity six for more information). What is your current understanding of influencing? How have advocates in your community used influencing to achieve their advocacy goals? How could you use influencing in your advocacy work?

### WHY INFLUENCE DECISION-MAKERS?

There are many reasons why influencing is a good idea. Most importantly, decision-makers often have the power and resources to make your advocacy goals a reality. They are not the only people in your community that can do this, but often they are the people with the most power and resources. When you seek to influence decision-makers, you can help give them more information on an issue which they do not understand as well as you, which can improve the chance that the decision-maker will make a decision that you agree with. And ultimately, you seek to influence the decision-maker so that they take action that will be good for the community.

### WHO TO INFLUENCE

Generally, governments, politicians and community leaders are the best people to seek to influence as they generally have the political power and resources to make change. But there are other decision-makers who you may also want to focus on depending on what you're trying to do. For example, there may be a national or international health NGO that has a lot of power but has not had a lot of focus on youth mental health, so you may try to influence their CEO.

### WHEN TO INFLUENCE

Whilst influencing decision-makers is worthwhile in most situations, the most valuable situations for influencing are when:

- the issue has a lot of attention in your community, so they are more likely to listen to you because you can help them solve it;
- the issue is highly important to you or your group, so you are more willing to use your time and resources;
- the decision-makers have not made up their minds, so a little bit of effort could make them take one decision over another; and
- you have information that decision-makers do not know, so you can help them.

## INFLUENCING ACTIVITIES

There are a number of different ways to influence decision-makers. Here are some of the main activities to help you get started:

- **Meetings.** Arranging meetings with decision-makers is one of the best ways to influence them. Meetings give you a chance to get your point across and learn about what your decision-maker thinks of your issue and how you can get them to take action.
- **Letters.** Writing to decision-makers is a great way to provide them information about your issue and ask them to take action. If you can get a number of people in your community to send letters at the same time as you, it's a good way to let them know that there is community support for action on this issue.
- **Social media.** A lot of decision-makers now listen to what people in their community think through their social media accounts. Directing social media posts at politicians, replying to their posts, or tagging them in posts with information about your issue can help to draw their attention to your issue.
- **Hearings and submissions.** Sometimes a government or community will ask people to provide information at public hearings or through written submissions. If they are related to mental health at all, even if it is not exactly focused on youth mental health, you can make a submission or offer to provide evidence at a hearing.

Find out [more about influencing activities in this online resource](#)<sup>37</sup> developed by Whittlesea Council.

## HOW TO INFLUENCE

The type of influencing that will be most effective is different for each decision-maker, but here are some tips which will help your influencing.

- **Make your message relevant to the audience.** For example, politicians and community leaders are worried about voters and what will help them politically. If you are contacting someone in an NGO, they are worried more about the social benefits of your project. Your influencing should help explain to the decision-maker how your advocacy meets their needs.
- **Have a base of support.** Influencing is more effective if it is supported by other people. This is because decision-makers respond to groups they are responsible to. For example, with politicians and community leaders, they are responsible to people who live in their area.
- **Be seen by the decision-maker.** In general, decision-makers won't make a decision that supports your advocacy unless they are aware of you. This means using direct communication, like writing letters or organising meetings, to make yourself as visible as possible.

Find out [more about how to influence here](#).<sup>38</sup>

## WHAT INFLUENCING IS NOT

When we talk about influencing, it does not include illegal or unethical activities, such as bribes (giving money to people so they do what you want, even if they don't believe it is right) or favours ('I will make the community vote for you if you do this thing'). Influencing is providing decision-makers with the best information to make good decisions about important issues. Influencing decision-makers is legal in most countries. Laws will be different in each country, so you should check with your community leaders, government or police what is and is not legal.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Amount of time, resources and experience	Less (capacity score 1-5)	More (capacity score 6-10)	A lot (capacity score 11-15)
<b>Activities</b>	Tell your local community leader or representative that investing in youth mental health is important to you. For example, you could write them an email or letter (using <a href="#">this template</a> <sup>39</sup> and <a href="#">this guide</a> <sup>40</sup> ), or tag them in a social media post.	Organise a meeting with your local community leader or representative to talk about addressing youth mental health (see <a href="#">this guide</a> <sup>41</sup> for help).  Organise for a community leader or representative to visit a youth mental health service in your community or attend a youth mental health event.	Create an influencing campaign using all of the above activities to communicate with decision-makers over an extended period of time.  Make a submission or attend a public hearing to your local or national government about the need for investment in youth mental health.

## GAINING PUBLIC SUPPORT

If your engagement with government and community leaders is not resulting in change, one effective way to attract more attention to your issue is to generate public support. Getting the public behind an issue can draw the focus of decision-makers, which can aid in your efforts to engage them. There are a number of ways you can gather and show public support for an issue, and below are a few examples.

### PETITION

Petitions are one of the oldest ways to undertake advocacy, but they continue to be highly effective today. A petition is a collection of signatures from people who support your issue. Petitions can be done physically or digitally. A physical petition involves you going out into your community with a list that people can add their names and signatures to. This normally involves you and your team talking to people on the street or at community events about your issue and asking them if they would like to support it. A digital petition, such as those hosted on the petition platform [change.org](https://www.change.org), requires people to login and provide their digital signature. This usually requires less work from you and your team, as you simply need to write out your proposal for change and put it up on the platform. People will then read it and sign it if they agree. The key with either physical or digital petitions is getting enough signatures to show significant public support. Once you have good support, you can then send your petition to the decision-makers in your community, who will see that a lot of people in their local area want to see change on this issue. Having this support will give you a better chance of convincing decision-makers to take action.

### PROTEST

Protests are a great way to show that there is significant public support and that an issue is urgent. Protests usually involve large groups of people who want to see action on an issue gathering in a location, and then using their voices as well as signs and symbols to demonstrate what action they want to see taken. By getting a large number of people to congregate in one location, you can draw the attention of decision-makers to your issue, as well as create strong media coverage, both of which will help you to achieve what you want. The laws on protesting are different in every country, so you should check with your community leaders or local police before organising one.

## CANVASSING OR DOOR-KNOCKING

Canvassing is the process of knocking on people's doors at their home and asking if you can tell them about your issue. The aims of canvassing can be varied: you might have a petition for people to sign, you might want to simply raise awareness of your issue in the community, or you might want to direct people to your website to find out more information about your work. Whatever the aim is, canvassing can be very effective as you are able to communicate face-to-face with people about the importance of addressing your issue and what they can do to help. It is helpful in developing strong relationships with people and engaging new people in your movement.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

Holding community events is a great way to raise awareness and create action in your community. Like protests, events can draw attention to your issue by bringing large numbers of supportive people together. However, events can be more flexible than protests. You can have a more positive feel to your event, and invite community leaders, politicians and other decision-makers to get involved. This gives you the opportunity to show decision-makers why your issue is important, and that there are people in the community willing to work with them to find a solution. Some ideas for events might include:

- educational events, where experts provide people with information about youth mental health;
- workshops, where people come to learn how to support the mental health of young people in the community; and
- forums, where young people can come together and talk about their experiences and how they are working to create more support for their peers in the community. See [this toolkit](#)<sup>42</sup> developed by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America for more information about community forums.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Amount of time, resources and experience	Less (capacity score 1-5)	More (capacity score 6-10)	A lot (capacity score 11-15)
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Get some of your friends and family to talk about mental health, and ask them to talk about it with others in the community (read first the <a href="#">sharing lived experience safely information on page 14</a>).</p> <p>Find potential mental health networks and organisations to volunteer for. Platforms such as <a href="#">Speak Your Mind</a> and the <a href="#">Blue Print Group</a> may assist with this.</p>	<p>Start an online petition on <a href="http://www.change.org">www.change.org</a> or a physical one in your community.</p> <p>Organise a community forum. <a href="#">This tool provides some good advice for starting community conversations</a>.<sup>43</sup></p> <p>Ask a local community group (for example, religious, sports or music groups) if you can talk about youth mental health at their next meeting.</p> <p>Plan a formal educational activity, such as an interactive workshop or a youth mental health pamphlet to distribute.</p>	<p>Start a canvassing campaign with a big group of people in your network. <a href="#">This resource has some tips</a><sup>44</sup> to help you get started.</p> <p>Organise a protest or demonstration in your community. Learn <a href="#">more about how to do it at this website</a>.<sup>45</sup></p>

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 14

Using an advocacy example or your own advocacy project or idea (see reflection activity six for more information), take a moment to think about how you might gain public support for an advocacy project, and how that might be useful in achieving your advocacy goals. What approach would be the most useful to gain public support in your community? Once you have that support, how would you use it to influence decision-makers?

## USING SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA FOR ADVOCACY

Although politicians, decision-makers and influencers may be more sensitive to what they see in traditional media, an increasing number of people use social and digital media to make their voices heard. Social and digital media include platforms like YouTube, vlogging, blogging, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 15

As you read through this section, think about how you have seen social media used to get people's attention. This might be for advocacy work, but it might also be for other types of campaigns, such as promoting a new movie or increasing interest for an event. How did these campaigns get people's attention? How could you use this in your advocacy work?

Social and digital media are important tools because they can be used to quickly reach lots of people. We've written some key steps to help you use social and digital media for your advocacy.

- 1. Establish yourself in the social and digital world.** In order to advocate you'll need to be on at least one social media site, or have a blog/website. Your accounts and/or websites will be the main way you advocate.
- 2. Understand how social and digital media works.** As you are creating accounts on social or digital media sites, try to understand more about how the site works – know the “dos and don'ts” of the platform. This will help your advocacy reach its audience.
- 3. Keep messages short and interesting.** There is a lot of information in social and digital media. For your voice to be heard, it needs to stand out amongst all this other information. One way to help this is by creating short, exciting messages which grab people's attention.
- 4. Use your audience.** As you become more established in social and digital media, there will hopefully be a bigger audience for your advocacy. Your audience can be important partners for your advocacy. For example, you can encourage them to share your information. Or you could provide contact details of decision-makers and encourage your audience to contact them.

You can [find out more about using social and digital media for advocacy at this website](#).<sup>46</sup>

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Amount of time, resources and experience	Less (capacity score 1-5)	More (capacity score 6-10)	A lot (capacity score 11-15)
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Share information about changing mental health policies, such as the <a href="#">#chatsafe guidelines</a> outlining safer ways to talk about suicide on social media.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the need to improve workplace mental health support by sharing resources, such as these <a href="#">key facts by the World Health Organisation</a>.<sup>47</sup></p> <p>Tag your local leader in a social media post about youth mental health.</p>	<p>Start a blog, channel or social media account and start producing content about youth mental health or your lived experience. The <a href="#">purplepersuasion blog is a good example</a>.</p>	<p>Create a social media campaign highlighting the barriers to mental health services in your community. For example, by getting people to share their stories online. The <a href="#">Sad Girls Club Instagram account is a good example</a>.</p>

## ENGAGING TRADITIONAL MEDIA FOR ADVOCACY

One of the key aims of advocacy is to get your message heard by as many people as possible, which increases the attention on your issue and makes it more likely that decision-makers will take action to address your issue. Traditional media – newspapers, television news shows, news radio programs – is an important way for your advocacy to reach a bigger audience. This section has some tips for working with traditional media.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 16

As you read through this section, think about how you have seen traditional media get people's attention. What are the stories that get published? Why are they more engaging than other stories? Use an advocacy example or your advocacy project or idea (see reflection activity six for more information) to come up with an engaging story that you could give to the media.

## WRITE MEDIA RELEASES

Journalists and producers rely on receiving good stories and you are in the best position to provide them with your story in a way that makes it seem important. A press release should be short, and is something that will make the journalist or producer want to know more. Use a headline that will grab their attention and write the release in a way that shows them your issue is important, such as highlighting the dangers of young people experiencing mental ill-health and not having access to services. Your media release should also have contact details of someone who is available to speak to the media if needed.

Find out more about media releases on [page 16 of Whittlesea Council's Advocacy Toolkit](#)<sup>48</sup> and on [this website](#).<sup>49</sup>

## USE PUBLIC EVENTS

Media releases are most effective if they are combined with a public event that can be attended by the media. If there is an event like a conference or government debate, then this is a good opportunity to develop a media release. If the media attends the event, then they may use your media release as part of their story on the event. If you have enough time and resources available, you might even consider holding an event, such as a public talk or a press conference, to try to get some media coverage.

## GET TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

One of the best ways to get free coverage is to contact and form a relationship with journalists and media producers. The stronger your relationships are, the more likely that your story will be made public. These relationships are often not formed straight away, but will improve with time. You can find out [more about creating good relationships with the media on this website](#).<sup>50</sup>

You can also check with your local media houses to find out their deadlines for news. Work to these deadlines when scheduling events or sending media releases.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Amount of time, resources and experience	Less (capacity score 1-5)	More (capacity score 6-10)	A lot (capacity score 11-15)
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Engaging traditional media with little time and resources can be difficult. One way that can be effective is that when mental health is getting a lot of attention, you can contact a media agency and offer to share your mental health story. Personal stories are one of the best ways for media agencies to get people to read, watch or listen to their work. If you do plan to share your story, make sure you use the information in section two to do it safely.</p>	<p>If you have a little more time and resources, you might try sending out a media release about your issue to see if you can get a media agency to publish a story about your issue or project. You can find more about preparing a media releases in <a href="#">this resource (page 16)</a><sup>51</sup> and on <a href="#">this website</a>.<sup>52</sup></p>	<p>If you have a lot of time and resources, you might consider creating a media campaign. This involves a planned series of activities in the media over a period of time, including activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contacting a media agency to create an article together about your issue or project, or to write an opinion piece.</li> <li>holding an event or press conference that aims to get a lot of media coverage, and invite some media agencies to attend; or</li> <li>creating a paid advertisement to feature it in a newspaper or on a website.</li> </ul> <p>You can find out <a href="#">more about these activities on this website</a>.<sup>53</sup></p>





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## SECTION FIVE: AFTER ADVOCACY

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## SECTION FIVE: AFTER ADVOCACY

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### ASSESSING YOUR PROGRESS

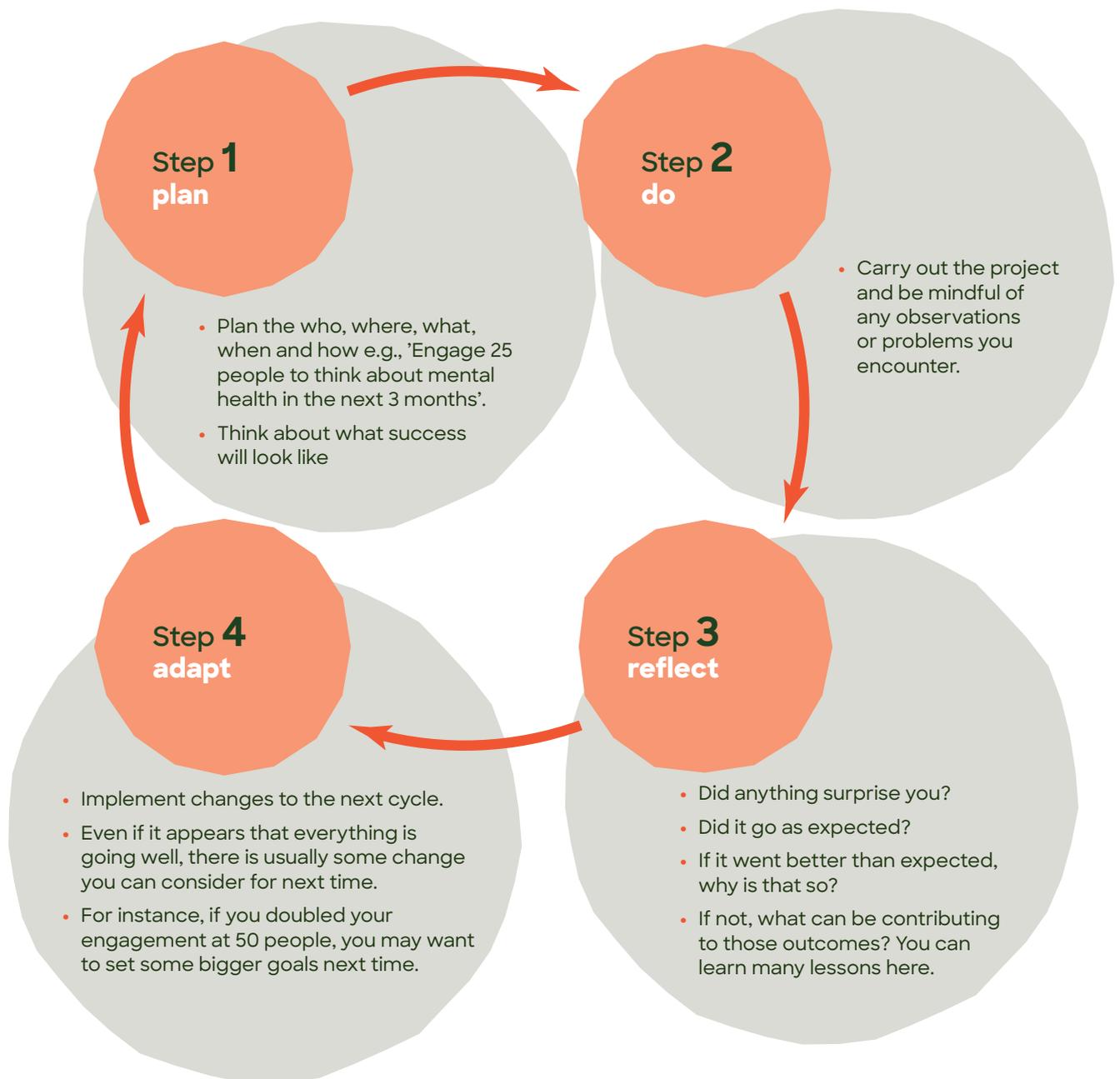
After doing some advocacy work, you may be wondering: “How did we do?”. This is a very common question and we often want feedback on our performance. In fact, measuring your progress can be one of the best ways to help you stay motivated and continue to be successful. Measuring your success also allows you to highlight it, meaning other people will be inspired by your progress and may want to join your cause. If you were not as successful as you would have liked, measuring your progress can be really helpful in understanding why you weren’t and what you can do better next time.

#### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 17

As you read through this section, use an advocacy example (see reflection activity six for more information) to think about if it was successful and how that was communicated. Did the project achieve its goals? How did they celebrate and highlight their success? Were there things that did not go to plan, and did they learn from these things?

There are many ways to assess your progress, although we will focus on the plan, do, reflect, adapt cycle (PDRA). We suggest this method because it is simple to use and helpful for many different types of advocacy. Once you have worked through it, you can go back to step one and repeat the cycle, and repeating it regularly, you can continuously improve your advocacy as you learn more about what works and what does not. Setting goals and refining them on an ongoing basis is part of this process.





## CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND EFFORTS

Celebrating your success, and the effort that went in to them, is a key part of advocacy. Making sure you take the time out to acknowledge all of your hard work and the change it has created in your community is very important to make sure you and those working with you feel rewarded by your efforts. Celebrating your wins can keep your motivation up and drive you to do better in future. Below are a few different ways you might want to celebrate your success:

- **A celebration event.** This could be as small as some of your friends and family coming to your house

for lunch, or as big as inviting members of the community for a gala ball. Whatever it is, use the event to congratulate people you worked with on how their efforts created great positive change.

- **Taking time to reflect.** Sometimes it is best to celebrate wins by just taking time to reflect on all the hard work that has gone into achieving them. Give yourself some time to just think about your journey from starting your project and how much you have achieved. It might even be nice to write down a few of your biggest achievements over that period.
- **Treat yourself!** Often when we are working on something that is really important it can be difficult to find time to do something just for

enjoyment. When you achieve a milestone, even if it is something small, reward yourself by doing an activity you enjoy. This is really effective because, not only does it make us feel happy, but it also makes us motivated to achieve another milestone so we can do more enjoyable things!

## HIGHLIGHTING SUCCESS

It is also very important to highlight your success. Highlighting success shows people in your community that you are good at what you do, and can help attract people to your work, meaning you have more support and resources available to keep achieving bigger things. It also shows decision-makers in your community that you are credible – you are effective at achieving things – which will make them more likely to trust and support you in future. Below are a few ideas for how you might highlight your success:

- **A celebration event.** As well as being a great way to celebrate, an event can also be a great way to highlight your success. Invite decision-makers and other people from the community, and talk to them about how your work has been successful. You can even get people you have helped to talk about their stories and how they are thankful for your efforts. Not only will this highlight your ability to achieve positive change, but it will create opportunities for you to build relationships with decision-makers.
- **Newsletter or social media posts.** Whether it be a physical newsletter or pamphlet, or a digital newsletter or social media post, sending news of your success to your community is a great way to show how effective your work is.
- **Evaluation report.** When you finish your project and undertake your evaluation, write down what you find, and put this on your website or print it out to show people in your community how your efforts achieved good results.
- **A sustainability plan.** Some stakeholders, in particular funders, may be interested in your goals to preserve sustainability. After putting in all the hard work to coordinate this advocacy project, take some time to think about how to keep the momentum going.
- **Media.** If your evaluation shows that you achieved something really important for the community, get in contact with the media and suggest that they write a story about it. If they think it is something important that people in the community would like to hear about, it may be beneficial for them to publish a story, which helps you get your success out to the public.

## LEARNING AND TRYING AGAIN

It is important to understand that often our advocacy efforts do not go to plan, and we don't get the results we want. It can make you feel disappointed and less motivated to keep doing advocacy. But it shouldn't! All successful advocates will have times when they do not achieve their goals – what makes them successful is that they learn why things didn't go as planned, come up with a plan to do better next time, and try again. This is what we call resilience, and it is one of the most important things in advocacy. If you get to the end of your advocacy project and you are feeling a bit down about not achieving your goals, below are a few things you can do to learn from your work, help get your motivation back, and try again.

- **Acknowledge your feelings.** It's ok to feel a little disappointed. Sometimes it's helpful to take a day or two and give yourself a chance to reflect on why you're feeling like that. You shouldn't do so for too long though – if you're still feeling a bit low after a couple of days, take some time to do something that makes you happy or spend some time with people you care about.
- **Appreciate the small wins.** You may not have achieved your goals, but you did achieve some other great things. Take some time to think about the smaller things you achieved and experienced. For example, you might not have created a youth mental health centre in your community, but you probably educated some people about youth mental health, learned a lot of skills and made some new friends.
- **Remember why you started.** Sometimes we get really busy and stressed and we forget about what inspired us to start doing advocacy in the first place. Reminding yourself about this can help you to find your motivation again!
- **Reframe your thoughts.** Don't think about your efforts as failure. Think about them as an opportunity to learn. Take time to consider why your efforts didn't go as planned, then start coming up with solutions.
- **Talk to others about your experiences.** Not only will they help you feel better, but they will also help you think about solutions.
- **When you're ready, try again!** Sometimes when we are feeling low, we can look at the challenges we faced in our advocacy and think they are too big to overcome. But once you get started, you will realise that they aren't so big and scary. Start with some small steps and soon you will be feeling better about your abilities and ready to overcome those challenges.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- **Advocacy Assembly**<sup>54</sup> – free online advocacy tools taught in English, Arabic and Farsi.
- **Advocating for Change for Adolescents!**<sup>55</sup> – a toolkit developed by the World Health Organization to help young people advocate for improved health and wellbeing.
- **Community Tool Box**<sup>56</sup> – comprehensive resources for community-building and advocacy in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Farsi.
- **Global Youth Mental Health Framework**<sup>57</sup> – a resource developed as part of the Global Youth Mental Health Framework Partnership project (along with this advocacy toolkit) between Orygen and the World Economic Forum which provides information to help governments and community leaders design good youth mental health services and systems.
- **Global Youth Investment Framework**<sup>58</sup> – a resource developed as part of the Global Youth Mental Health Framework Partnership project (along with this advocacy toolkit) between Orygen and the World Economic Forum which provides information about why it is important for decision-makers to invest in youth mental health services.
- **Jack.org**<sup>59</sup> – a website dedicated to revolutionising youth mental health by training young leaders, which includes many helpful resources.
- **MiNDbank**<sup>60</sup> – an online platform developed by the World Health Organization that provides information on international, national and regional mental health policies, strategies and laws.
- **Mental Health Atlas**<sup>61</sup> – a resource and website developed by the World Health Organization that provides statistics, information and resources about mental health in almost every country in the world.
- **The Mental Health Gap Action Programme Community Toolkit**<sup>62</sup> – a toolkit developed by the World Health Organization to help local communities identify and address mental health needs.
- **Speak your mind: Return on the individual report**<sup>63</sup> – this resource provides lots of great information and compelling arguments for investing in mental health.

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