
Submission

Infrastructure Victoria: 30 year infrastructure strategy

1. About this submission

This submission is made on behalf of Drygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. Drygen strongly supports the draft recommendation by Infrastructure Victoria that a new or expanded forensic mental health facility for adults be provided within five to ten years. Our submission highlights the need to include new or dedicated facility providing inpatient and community care for forensic patients aged 12-25 years within the final 30-year infrastructure strategy, as this is the peak period both of offending behaviour and the emergence of mental ill-health. This submission has two goals:

- 1.1 Outline the unmet need for forensic mental health services for young people.
- 1.2 Outline the existing lack of facilities and failure of existing systems to deliver forensic mental health services for young people.
- 1.3 Identify the need to include a new forensic facility for young people in Infrastructure Victoria's final 30-year infrastructure strategy.

2. About Drygen – the National Centre for Youth Mental Health

Drygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. Drygen's work has created a new, more positive approach to the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, and has developed new models of care for young people with emerging disorders. This work has been translated into a worldwide shift in services and treatments to include a primary focus on getting well and staying well, and health care models that include partnership with young people and families.

Drygen is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It is a charitable entity with Deductible Gift Recipient Status and is an approved research institute. The Company has three Members: the Colonial Foundation, The University of Melbourne and Melbourne Health.

3. The unmet need for forensic mental health services for young people

Young people are at greater risk of experiencing mental ill-health and participating in offending behaviour than any other age group in the community. Despite these risks, specialised mental health services for young offenders and preventive forensic services for youth with mental ill-health are either entirely lacking, or grossly limited/inadequate. Providing appropriate evidence based treatment and access to forensic mental health beds for this population will improve the mental health and life prospects of individuals and will contribute to building safer communities.

The prevalence of mental ill-health is higher among young people engaged in the justice system and increases among young people in residential detention¹. There is also a link between the seriousness of crimes committed and mental disorders with a higher proportion of violent crimes committed by people with (predominantly untreated) psychosis². Although they experience a higher prevalence of mental ill-health young people connected with justice system are less likely to have accessed mental health services³.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are over-represented in the Victorian justice system by a factor of eleven⁴. This situation demands that forensic services cater for the needs of this population group.

There are no specialist forensic mental health services provided to young people in the juvenile justice system. The Victorian Ombudsman has previously found that the Melbourne Youth Justice Precinct was 'struggling to meet adequately the needs of children who are seriously mentally ill'⁵. Young people who could benefit most

from treatment are being denied the specialised mental health services they need despite negotiated protocols for access to outpatient and bed-based mental health services, overseen by the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist. A 'perceived organisational bias' has also been identified in public hospitals in Australia against forensic inpatients⁶ which further highlights the importance of dedicated forensic mental health facilities.

There is an urgent need for a new, dedicated forensic mental health facility for young people in Victoria.

This facility should be included in Infrastructure Victoria's final 30-year infrastructure strategy with the recommendation the facility be provided within the next five years.

4. Further information

For further information and follow up relating to this submission, please contact:

David Baker

Senior Policy Analyst

Email: david.baker@orygen.org.au

5. References

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4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Victoria: youth justice supervision in 2014–15. 2016: Canberra.
5. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into conditions at the Melbourne Youth Justice Precinct. 2010, Ombudsman Victoria: Melbourne.
6. Griffiths, K.M., J. Mendoza, and B. Carron-Arthur, Where to mental health reform in Australia: is anyone listening to our independent auditors? *Med J Aust*, 2015. **202**(4): p. 172-4.