

Australian Medical Research and Innovation Two Year Priorities

Title: Youth Mental Health: the need for evidence-based interventions and treatment

Submitted by: Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health

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1. What is the gap in Australia's health system to be addressed by this priority?

There is an unacceptable gap in the health outcomes and mortality for people with a mental illness (the third largest disease burden in Australia) compared with the Australian norm. Youth mental health research is vital if this gap is to be closed as 75 percent of illness onset is by the age of 24 years. The development of mental disorders during this stage of life can significantly derail future educational and employment opportunities, to the detriment of the individual and their family, and the broader society and economy.

2. How does your area of priority address either an existing or a new health or health system challenge?

The Mental Health Commission and Australian Government have recognised the public health opportunity of reforming the health system to address the challenge presented by mental ill-health. Despite continued underfunding, Australian researchers have a proven capacity in developing interventions and treatments for mental ill-health.

3. Comment on which aims and objectives your priority is likely to meet.

Translating research investment and collaboration into applied early interventions for youth mental health will reduce the burden of morbidity. Enhanced targeting and efficiency in mental health care will increase the sustainability of the health system and deliver longer-term economic benefits through lower chronic disease rates, increased economic participation and reduce health and social inequalities.

4. Mandatory considerations – which of the mandatory considerations set out in the *Medical Research Future Fund Act (2015)* does your priority proposal address?

- Burden of disease on the Australian Community
- How to deliver practical benefits from medical research and medical innovation to as many Australians as possible
- How to ensure that financial assistance provides that greatest value for all Australians
- How to ensure that disbursements complement and enhance other assistance provided to the sector

5. Outline of priority proposal:

Mental health is a neglected area of research, despite presenting a significant public health opportunity. Mental health issues are responsible for the third highest disease burden behind cancer and cardiovascular disease, but produce the highest lost economic output by disease type. The opportunity exists to match the improved health outcomes already achieved in cancer and cardiovascular diseases by funding mental health research at a level that achieves parity with the burden of disease it creates.

Australia has a proven track record in developing and implementing evidence-based mental health treatments; especially for young people. This is despite the continued underfunding of mental health research compared with other diseases. Greater investment in youth mental health research is required if the huge potential of early interventions for this age group and the associated long-term health, economic and social benefits are to be realised.

The longer a health issue goes untreated the greater the long-term health impact and disease burden. Delayed or untreated poor mental health also results in accumulated physical health

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effects, further increasing the burden on the health system and wider social and economic effects for the Australian community.

Research into early interventions for mental ill-health and a greater focus on delivering interventions and treatments as near to illness onset as possible will deliver the greatest possible benefits to individuals, their families and the community. Mental ill-health is the greatest health burden for young people and increased evidenced based services will deliver practical benefits to the one-in-four young people experiencing mental ill-health in any given year.

Mental ill-health is a Commonwealth health priority and overlaps with State and Territory government and community services. Reforms to mental health services are designed to ensure that this overlap is reduced, which in turn ensures that investment in mental health research and translation into improved services will provide the greatest investment value. The benefits of addressing mental ill-health near its onset has the greatest potential to deliver economic benefits as it improves the health of Australians in the prime productive years of life.

6. What measures of success do you propose and what will be the impact on health care consumers?

Internationally, Australia is considered a leader in youth mental health innovation. The translation of research in early interventions into applied practice by Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health has seen interventions replicated internationally.

The approach taken in targeting cancer and cardiovascular diseases provides a template for measuring the success of research, evidence-based treatment and service implementation and improved health outcomes for people with mental ill-health. A coordinated research and service delivery approach will incorporate:

1. Early detection/intervention;
2. Evidence-based treatment and systems;
3. Integration research and clinical practice; and
4. Discovery of novel treatments.

Examples of measurements of success include:

- Access by young people to mental health services.
- Increased training of primary, allied and specialist health professionals.
- Use of guidelines for the delivery of evidenced-based early interventions.
- Greater research into the economics of existing and emerging treatments.
- Leveraging mental health services (i.e., headspace) to develop clinical trials networks.
- Demonstrated translation of research trials into health programs.
- A national follow-up study of young people recovering from mental ill-health.

Measuring the success of youth mental health research and translation into policy and practice is an integral part of the iterative evidence required for sustained success. To be successful, more investment is also needed in the research infrastructure available for mental health research.

7. Please outline any linkages your proposal has with stakeholders, policy agendas and other health and medical research funding agencies.

Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health (Orygen) has led the implementation of two national early intervention models in headspace, Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation and the Youth Early Psychosis Program. These programs have been adopted internationally and demonstrate the capacity of Australia to develop world-leading programs for youth mental health. These systems provide a unique opportunity to further

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research novel treatments for youth mental health and has resulted in international research investment.

Research undertaken by Orygen is a collaboration between experts in their fields together with clinicians and allied health professionals working with young people experiencing mental ill-health. This collaboration is exemplified by the Australian Early Psychosis Research Network, which is working to develop effective and cost-effective interventions to achieve substantial improvement in health and social outcomes for people living with psychosis.

A number of highly regarded organisations, including Orygen, are developing innovative trials and programs to improve the mental health outcomes for young people. This work would be enhanced through the prioritising of youth mental health through the Medical Research Future Fund over the next two years and into the future.

Presently the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is the largest funder of mental health research. This funding, however, is negatively disproportionate to the disease burden of mental illness. Although mental illness accounts for approximately 13 percent of Australia's overall burden of disease (higher among young people), currently only 8.6 percent of all NHMRC funding is allocated to mental health research.

The proportion of funding for youth mental health has not increased noticeably over the past decade (17.6 percent of all mental health research funding). Despite the significant health risks and high rates of illness, youth mental health research only received \$13.9 million in 2013-14. The funding gap for mental health research, and in particular, youth mental health, means that research and innovation in this area should be a priority of the Medical Research Future Fund.

The goals Orygen uses to guide its work are to:

- Contribute to a better understanding of the causes and impacts of mental ill-health in young people.
- Meet the needs and preferences of young people and their families.
- Support the development of accessible, effective, equitable and sustainable service responses.
- Undertake large-scale studies in the youth mental health field that are made possible by the headspace network.
- Align with national policy directions and service system priorities.

To achieve these goals Orygen will continue to foster strong partnerships with academic institutions and the Primary Health Networks in the trialling and development of new and improved youth mental health models of care. Research projects and trials are designed to fit within clinical services and complement their activities. Collaboration contributes to the development and maintenance of a health workforce expert in working with young people. It is important that the progress and outcomes of projects are communicated to all stakeholders to maximise the benefits of this research for the improvement of young people's health and implementation of evidence based treatments and programs.

Finally, the Australian Government has commissioned Orygen to provide policy briefings on youth mental health. These policy briefings are a translation pathway that maximises the opportunity to successfully turn innovative research into practical policy options. The implementation of evidence-based policies, interventions and treatments supports the Medical Research Future Fund objective of high-quality, cost-effective health care.

Improved life outcomes for young people will be achieved when world-leading research is funded and translated into applied policy and practice.