



Health and Disability Commissioner
Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga

Report calls for stronger focus on mental well-being and recovery

28 February 2018

Mental Health Commissioner Kevin Allan says New Zealand needs to broaden its focus from mental illness and addiction to mental well-being and recovery. He today released *New Zealand's mental health and addiction services: The monitoring and advocacy report of the Mental Health Commissioner* – which is an independent assessment of the state of mental health and addiction services in New Zealand.

The report makes a number of recommendations to the Minister of Health, and calls for a clear action plan to respond to New Zealanders' mental health and addiction needs.

Mr Allan says that while growing numbers of New Zealanders are accessing health services for mental health and addiction issues, these services are under pressure and many needs are left unmet.

“Often services are available to people only once their condition deteriorates, and the most common treatment options of medication and therapy don't address the broader social factors that help people be well and support their recovery.

“These social factors include housing, income, education, and social and cultural connections.”

He says Māori, Pacific peoples, young people and people in prison have higher mental health and addiction needs than many other population groups.

“While services and support are currently provided to all those groups, we need to do more in specific areas.

“For example, it is of great concern to me that community treatment order¹ rates are nearly four times higher for Māori males and seclusion rates almost five times higher than for other populations. We need to work out what's behind this and how we address it.”

However, Mr Allan says there are also many signs of progress.

“The majority of consumers report positive experiences of mental health and addiction services, people generally improve when they are in services, and we are seeing some innovative ways to deliver services being trialled.”

He says we need more of these new approaches to mental well-being, developed with consumers.

¹ When a court orders that a person with a mental health disorder must receive treatment for up to six months.

“Access to mental health and addiction services has grown 73 percent over the last decade, while funding has grown only 40 percent. More of the same is simply not okay. We need to be smarter about what we do and how we provide the most effective support for people.”

Mr Allan is calling for an action plan to:

- broaden the focus of service delivery from mental illness and addiction to mental well-being and recovery
- increase access to health and other support services
- improve the quality of mental health and addiction services
- ensure timely information is available about changing levels of need, current services and support, and evidence about best practice
- implement a workforce strategy that enables the sector to deliver better, more accessible services
- achieve changes through collaborative leadership, supported by robust structures and accountabilities to ensure successful, transparent results.

He says the report findings suggest a loss of traction in the sector.

“Collaborative leadership is needed to establish a plan of action and, just as importantly, ensure it is delivered.”

The report, prepared as part of the Commissioner’s independent monitoring and advocacy role, is being released as the Government begins an inquiry into mental health and addiction.

Mr Allan welcomes the Government’s commitment to having a special focus on mental health and the breadth of focus of the terms of reference of the inquiry.

“That breadth is necessary to ensure we focus on promoting mental well-being and recovery while also improving services.”

He says the inquiry will inform Government decisions about governance and leadership of the sector, which means his concerns about leadership can be addressed.

“I look forward to assisting the inquiry team in whatever way I can.”

For further information, contact Sue O’Connor, Office of the Health & Disability Commissioner, on 027 432 6709.