



Mental Health Reform Advisory Committee

Meeting 4 Summary – 23 November 2023

The fourth meeting of the advisory committee was held on 23 November 2023.

Members acknowledged that mental health reform is part of a bigger, long-term journey to reform the health system. This will need to consider the outcomes of other inquiries, evaluations and reform processes currently underway, such as the next National Health Reform Agreement.

Members discussed mental health assessment and referral, in the context of work currently underway to review the Initial Assessment and Referral Decision Support Tool. Members noted current challenges in assessing and referring within a stepped care model, due to service gaps within the system, and developing a single tool to be used in variety of settings. However, members highlighted the potential gains from a consistent triage, assessment and referral process.

Members discussed solutions for people with severe and complex needs. Members acknowledged the importance of system integration and coordination for this cohort above all else. Members also acknowledged the impact of significant workforce challenges for Head to Health Centres and PHN-commissioned services due to shortages and maldistribution. Members considered sophisticated and nuanced solutions would be required to avoid unintended consequences and further exacerbating equity issues, such as those experienced while the additional 10 Better Access sessions were in effect.

Members also built on discussions in previous advisory committee meetings on the distributional equity of mental health services, by looking at affordability as a critical access barrier. While affordability was acknowledged as a problem for Medicare-subsidised services specifically, members also considered the role of Primary Health Networks in delivering more affordable care.

The advisory committee is expected to meet early in 2024 to continue discussions on the four initial areas of focus.