

Annexure D



Mid North Coast Local Health District

29 September July 2023

Dr Nicola

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr Holmes

Mid North Coast Local Health District Mental Health Services

I write in reply to your recent correspondence received 15 September 2023 regarding the recent occurrences of suicide within the Coffs Harbour community and the evaluation of Mental Health Services delivered by the Mid North Coast Local Health District (MNCLHD).

Firstly, I acknowledge the devastating impact these tragic events have on individuals, families and the wider community. I respect your ongoing advocacy in this space and more specifically in support of your patients.

In response to your questions, I provide the below responses for your information.

1. *How can the board members be assured that the mental health needs of the local population are known and have been adequately assessed?*

There are many agencies that work state-wide to identify trends in mental health needs of the people of NSW in particular:

- Mental Health Branch, Ministry of Health
- Perinatal, Child and Youth, Ministry of Health
- Aboriginal Mental Health, Ministry of Health
- InforMH, System Information and Analytics Branch, System Sustainability and Performance Division
- The Mental Health Commission of NSW
- The NSW Audit Office

MNCLHD works closely with the Ministry of Health on analysis of data for our region to understand our communities needs and use this for planning. Our local Mental Health services have a Consumer Advisory Group, an Elders Reference Group and Community Action Groups focussed on suicide postvention who provide personal and professional perspectives to our planning. Our representatives attend interagency meetings across the district to understand the gaps and issues experienced by local non-government and government services.

2. *How does the board know that the LHD is working productively with others in the same space for example NGOs, DCJ, Justice Health and PHN to ensure that those presenting with mental health*



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conditions or psychological distress receive coordinated and appropriate care in the community when not accepted into hospital led interventions and care?

There are a number of forums and service relationships where clinical and/or service communication and support may be provided in relation to clients that come in contact with our service or are supported by partner agencies. Our local Mental Health services have two network rehabilitation coordinators, who are engaged with a large number of partner local organisations in providing clinical consultation, and education and training. Our staff are leaders that assist the literacy of other agencies and service providers in the Mental Health landscape. This level of engagement ensures that where required, teams are working together to provide wrap-around care and consultation.

- a. *Are referrals happening to Wesley after care service for all those who present with attempted suicide?*

Wesley Aftercare was an important addition to the support offered for our Coffs Harbour community, for those experiencing suicidal ideation or post suicidal behaviour. It is our understanding that new Aftercare services are being established by Wellways (for Men) and Galambila Aboriginal Medical Services.

- b. *Does the emergency department or ACS make referrals to the iam program for all youth under 25 who present with suicidal thinking who are not admitted?*

Both the Emergency Mental Health Acute Addiction Response Team and Acute Care Services refer patients who meet the criteria to the 'I am' program at New Horizons.

- c. *Do all patients and their carers receive support to contact head to health service?*

Mission Australia's Family and Carer Mental Health program is available for carer support and education. This service is promoted regularly to all Mental Health clinicians and regular referrals are provided from our service.

- d. *Do hospital psychiatrists provide detailed letters for patients outlining diagnosis and treatment responses for those with complex mental health needs who would benefit from NDIS support workers)?*

Our Psychiatrists support their patients with regard to applications for NDIS, whether commenced in hospital or in the community as part of our responsibility to ensure our clients have access to the supports they need post discharge to the community or while under our care as community clients. This is additional to discharge summaries which have information on treatment, diagnosis and recommendations for ongoing support relating to recent care and are often used to support NDIS applications.

3. *Given that the Mid north coast has higher than state and national average death by suicide rates how can the board be assured that the district is receiving the appropriate amount of funding to meet the local communities needs regarding treatment for mental health challenges, and that the funding is being directed to those with the greatest need?*



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Suicide rates are higher in regional areas across Australia. In 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 the rate of suicide in MNCLHD did show some peaks and troughs. Data currently in analysis, suggests that for 2022 and 2023 this has plateaued.

The NSW Government has invested in the NSW Suicide Monitoring System - Towards Zero Suicides program. The MNCLHD has a Suicide Prevention Coordinator position which was permanently recruited to in 2022. This role is responsible for understanding the local context and areas of need including working with local communities collaboratively to address suicide concerns across MNCLHD through a wide range of activities such as:

- Safe Haven in Port Macquarie
- Suicide Prevention Outreach Team in Kempsey
- Rural Counsellor in Aboriginal Specialist Wellbeing Service in Kempsey
- Postvention support through a Community Collaborative in Coffs Harbour
- Youth Aftercare Pilot (Iam) in Coffs Harbour
- Building on Aboriginal Communities' Resilience in Kempsey and Nambucca
- Post Suicide Support (District wide)
- Zero Suicides in Care (District wide)

In addition to the above responses, the District has previously engaged with you and responded to concerns you have raised:

- Mental health service provision (April 2021)
- Access to oral health services (August 2021)
- Oral surgery waiting lists (August 2021)
- Policy concerning the exclusion of certain patients from care or service provision (April 2022)
- Junior medical officer (JMO) staffing at Coffs Harbour Health Campus (CHHC) (August 2022)
- JMO staffing and Director of Medical Services (DMS) recruitment at CHHC (October 2022)
- Pacemaker insertion (October 2022)
- JMO staffing and DMS recruitment at CHHC Ministerial (November 2022)
- Staffing, culture, DMS staffing, mental health service provision (November 2022)
- Oral health, culture, pacemaker services, support staff (November 2022)
- Pacemaker services (March 2023)
- Acute Care Service (ACS) (March 2023)
- SafeWork NSW and Government Information (Public Access) Act (April 2023)
- ACS team and emergency department at CHHC (May 2023)
- SafeWork NSW (June 2023).

Further to this, Penny Jones, the District's Director of Integrated Mental Health Alcohol & Other Drugs, her team and Mr Stewart Dowrick, Chief Executive, MNCLHD, have met with you on a number of occasions to discuss your concerns about mental health service provision.



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Engagement and responses to you at the current level is resulting in an unreasonable redeployment of resources that the District cannot sustain. The District requests that further advocacy regarding primary care providers and the continuity of care between the District and primary care mental health services be directed through the Primary Health Network (PHN), who can advocate on behalf of the greater primary care community and collaborate with the Local Health District utilising existing communication channels and partnerships.

If you are required to provide feedback on behalf of your patients, the District's Consumer Relations Office will handle this process and can be contacted on MNCLHD-ConsumerRelations@health.nsw.gov.au or 1800 726 997.

Additionally, you can contact the NSW Ombudsman by calling 1800 451 524 or by submitting an on-line complaint form (<https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/Making-a-complaint/complaints-form>).

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kim Edwards".

Kim Edwards

Acting Director, Integrated Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Services