



Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

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Commissioner
Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding
Sydney NSW 2000

Submission online via the Special Commission's website

headspace National welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding.

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds. headspace has 154 centres across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, and offers online and phone support services and resources through eheadspace.

Our work builds the mental health literacy of young people and reduces stigma associated with mental health problems and the associated barriers to seeking help. headspace can help young people with mental health, physical health (including sexual health), alcohol and other drug services, and work and study support. Our work also involves supporting schools and their communities with expert advice and guidance on mental health and wellbeing, responding to loss through suicide, and providing support after major disaster events. At the heart of all our services are young people, their needs, and the needs of those who support them.

Attachment 1 provides headspace National's priority areas for reform and responses to the Terms of Reference for which headspace can offer insight.

Our response highlights:

- **the value of headspace's national platform** – with the necessary infrastructure and governance arrangements in place, as well as unique experience and expertise, headspace is well placed to respond to existing and emerging youth mental health needs
- **the scope for New South Wales (NSW) to build on investment in headspace** – NSW has been a leader nationally in maximising the benefits of the headspace platform, and there is capacity to build on this further, particularly in the area of innovative digital programs and in responding to natural disasters
- **headspace's investment in the youth mental health workforce** – headspace provides a safe, supportive and innovative environment for students, graduates and early career professionals to develop their skills and grow as healthcare workers.

headspace National would welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of our submission further and looks forward to learning of the outcomes of this inquiry.

Yours faithfully



Jason Trethowan
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment 1: headspace National submission

Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

Introduction

The Special Commission's terms of reference are wide-ranging. Our submission responds to those relevant to headspace, the youth mental health workforce, and the delivery of services to young people across the state.

Young people, more than other age groups, experience high rates of mental ill-health. headspace's 2022 National Youth Mental Health Survey found just under half of young people are experiencing high or very high psychological distress (47%). The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, financial concerns, climate change, the trauma of natural disasters, and worries about the future are all contributing. It is vital that young people across New South Wales have access to high quality, timely, and accessible mental health services.

About headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, providing prevention and early intervention mental health services to 12–25-year-olds across the country. The headspace platform provides multidisciplinary care for mental health, physical health (including sexual health), alcohol and other drugs, and work and study across a range of services. headspace offers in person, online and phone services, and supports young people in school settings.

headspace was established in 2006 to address the challenges faced by young people aged 12-25, including:

- a lack of age appropriate and developmentally appropriate services for young people
- a lack of early intervention services
- young people's need for holistic care rather than a medical model of care
- barriers that young people in particular experience in accessing support, including stigma, cost, a lack of services in regional areas, and limited availability of online supports.

headspace now has more than 154 services embedded in local communities across metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Each centre is run by a local agency, and a consortium of local service providers, influencers and community members come together to guide and nurture their local headspace centres. This ensure the headspace service is deeply embedded within the local system and community.

headspace National provides support to the national network of centres, and ensures each centre is consistent with the headspace model (including branding, access, clinical leadership, practice management and community and youth engagement).

This national network provides a platform for integrated service delivery, providing holistic care and enabling other services for young people to be added. headspace National and NSW Health have worked with centres to provide a range of additional supports to young people (see Appendix for details). headspace has established capability that enables us to respond quickly as the need arises, and our work is collaborative and responsive. We focus on ensuring coordinated interagency activation and clear communications with government, feeding back information and real time intelligence. headspace National has also developed a strong relationship with the NSW Department of Education.

Term of reference (a) – the funding of health services provided in NSW and how the funding can most effectively support the safe delivery of high quality, timely, equitable and accessible patient-centred care and health services to the people of NSW, now and into the future

Key takeaways

- The headspace network provides a platform for the delivery of accessibly, high quality and effective mental health services for young people. There are opportunities for the NSW Government to leverage this platform to meet the needs of young people across the state.
- headspace has a network of 45 services embedded in communities across NSW, including 22 centres in regional, rural and remote locations. These centres provide services to hard-to-reach groups, and enable community-level responses to crisis events.
- headspace also provides services to young people in NSW via the national service offerings, including eheadspace and headspace telepsychiatry.

headspace has a Commonwealth-funded network of 45 centres across New South Wales, with 22 centres in metropolitan areas and the remainder in regional, rural and remote areas of the state. In 2022/23, headspace provided 125,943 occasions of service across these centres. In addition, all young people can access headspace's digital programs; in 2022/23:

- 3,396 service users accessed eheadspace
- 606 service users accessed Work and Study Online
- 4,034 young people nationally logged into online community chats targeting specific needs and experiences.

NSW was the first jurisdiction to agree bilateral commitments with the Commonwealth under the National Partnership on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

The Commonwealth and NSW governments agreed to invest in the enhancing youth mental health services across the state, including through strengthening the headspace platform. This included commitments to:

- establish a partnership approach to enhance, through funding or an equivalent in-kind contribution, 31 existing and 3 planned headspace services to increase access to multidisciplinary youth mental health services in NSW, consistent with the headspace model, with a focus on ensuring young people can access an appropriate level of support, wait times are minimised, and transition between headspace and NSW youth mental health services is streamlined.
- work collaboratively to identify an approach to improving access to multidisciplinary youth mental health services in NSW that ensures integration with existing services. NSW will work with new and existing headspace sites to provide support for complex and/or severe presentations and to facilitate a transition to state-based services where needed.¹

The headspace network represents an opportunity for governments to invest in effective, evidence-based programs to support the health and wellbeing of young people.

headspace is the most recognised youth mental health service in Australia, and its services are deeply embedded in local communities across the state. In recent years, the NSW Government has funded headspace to deliver a range of programs that leverage the state-wide network, including community collaboratives (see case study below). **Table 1** in the Appendix provides a summary of NSW Health-funded programs delivered by headspace.

¹ Bilateral schedule on mental health and suicide prevention: New South Wales, March 2022.

These programs have been successful in providing services to young people, and in building the youth mental health workforce in NSW. In addition, through these programs, headspace has built unique expertise, including in:

- **suicide prevention** using a rapid response model to contain the epicentre of risk, then detect and prevent further risk. Our expertise delivers significant benefits including localised awareness campaigns around help-seeking, increased mental health support, and the implementation of mechanisms to improve coping, wellbeing and resilience.
- **disaster recovery** to support and guide schools and communities through the short, medium and long term phases of recovery following an event, via trauma informed mental health training, service support, suicide prevention and community resilience.

This creates an opportunity for NSW Government to further utilise the headspace platform – and our unique expertise and community relationships – to deliver services to young people, including hard-to-reach groups such as First Nations young people, First Nations young people, and LGBTIQ+ young people, rural and remote young people, and young people from multicultural backgrounds.

Case study: NSW Community Collaboratives and Community Grants

When suicide deaths occur in a town or region, the devastation is felt community wide. It is a critical time for support services and bodies to unite and activate a fast, effective, cohesive and compassionate response.

Building on the work that headspace National has delivered for over 10 years in suicide-impacted communities, the NSW Community Collaboratives provide a rapid response postvention model that aims to contain the epicentre of risk, then detect and prevent further risk. It is a three-step process, beginning with the establishment of an interagency group to work alongside mental health agencies Lifeline and headspace. Stakeholders typically include Primary Health Networks, mental health services, police, ambulance and government representatives.

The postvention phase may last up to 12 months before services resume their suicide prevention strategies. With the impact on community members and media attention in mind, a collective communication protocol is co-designed and shared. A regional action plan is then developed with response, recovery and resilience as the key objectives. Each Collaborative focuses on a specific region or town, as bespoke approaches are known to be more time-efficient and effective.

Benefits include localised awareness campaigns around help-seeking, increased mental health support, and the implementation of mechanisms to improve coping, wellbeing and resilience. Risk detection and monitoring is also intensified, particularly after hours. Another aspect of bespoke local responses is working with regional bereavement services to support families and individuals most impacted, while offering grief training and strategies across schools, community clubs and groups. A flexible funding pool (community grants program) is available to support capacity building and staffing in those communities.

Between May 2021 and December 2022, the NSW Collaboratives worked in 12 regions across the state, with all 12 entering into a grant agreement to receive funds to implement key activities. When a region is activated, the consultant will work with identified local stakeholders to implement the three main areas of the rapid response model (i.e. regional interagency group, communication protocol and regional action plan). Over the last 18 months, some of the actions that have been implemented in communities include targeted gatekeeper training, media campaigns and support and community wellbeing days.

The immediate impacts and enduring outcomes of this rapid response postvention model include:

- strengthened collaboration and interagency activation.
- supported containment and guidance for media responses.
- ascertained capacity of agencies and services to enhance services and strengthen referral pathways.
- activated localised training of all relevant workforces and audiences. established safe and contained sharing of real time intelligence and data.
- guided development and implementation of local action plans (including capacity building, suicide prevention and health promotion).
- established local communication and response protocols for deaths (and near misses).
- intensified risk detection and monitoring, including application of national principles learned through other risk areas
- activated localised awareness campaigns around help seeking and mental health literacy
- improved protective factors, coping, wellbeing, resilience.

Term of reference (c) – the way NSW Health funds health services delivered in public hospitals and community settings, and the extent to which this allocation of resources supports or obstructs access to preventative and community health initiatives and overall optimal health outcomes for all people across NSW

Key takeaways

- headspace is working with NSW Health and the Commonwealth Government to deliver enhancements from bilateral investments in youth mental health services, including funding for prevention and early intervention.

There is a growing body of evidence that primary prevention interventions can reduce the prevalence and cost of mental illness, reinforcing the need to build and support effective primary care for young people's mental health needs. The Productivity Commission has estimated that reforms across mental health prevention, early intervention and service delivery could save Australia the equivalent of nearly \$18 billion per annum.² Investment in prevention and early intervention is important to reduce demand for hospital-based mental health services

headspace National is working with NSW Health and the Commonwealth Government to support the implementation of the youth prevention and early intervention mental health commitments under the bilateral schedule of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement. This includes:

- providing guidance and advice on the local allocation of Commonwealth Government enhancement funding via Primary Health Networks
- strengthening integration of headspace with state-funded services, to increase access to appropriate care.

Under the bilateral agreement, NSW Health is investing \$42.512m over 5 years to increase access, reduce wait times, and ensure integration with existing services. This money will equip Local Health Districts (LHDs) to provide in-reach clinical services to headspace centres. These local collaborations will help to prevent young people with more complex needs from falling through the gaps between primary and specialist services, and to improve referral pathways and continuity of care.

LHDs and headspace services operate in the context of nation-wide workforce shortages and recruitment and retention challenges. These shortages are particularly acute in regional and rural areas. headspace's established online supports, such as the headspace Telepsychiatry Service and headspace Connect, provide an opportunity for investment to ensure sustained access to specialist support to services and young people in locations where in-person access is not possible. For more discussion relating to workforce, see terms of reference (f) and (g) below.

² Productivity Commission. (2020). *Mental health inquiry report, Volume 2*.

Term of reference (f) – the current capacity and capability of the NSW Health workforce to meet the current needs of patients and staff, and its sustainability to meet future demands and deliver efficient, equitable and effective health services, including:

(iii) evaluating financial and non-financial factors that impact on retention and attraction of staff;

(x) the role of multi-disciplinary community health services in meeting current and future demand and reducing pressure on the hospital system.

Key takeaways

- Many headspace centres find it difficult to attract and recruit staff. To address this, headspace has developed an Early Career Program, using a 'grow our own' strategy to meet demand for allied health workers, in particular social workers, occupational therapists and psychologists.
- headspace is working with NSW Health LHDs to adopt alternate workforce and service delivery models, particularly where they struggle to recruit youth psychiatrists.

Investment in a larger, appropriately skilled youth mental health workforce is critical to providing effective, appropriate and accessible care to young people.

In common with health and social care service sectors nationally, mental health is facing acute workforce shortages and long-term under-resourcing at a time when demand and complexity are growing year-on-year. There is a particular need for a secure and ongoing supply of appropriately qualified youth mental health professionals and specialists, as well as non-clinical youth and peer workers, to address the current and continuing shortages – which directly impacts on the quality and accessibility of services.

Currently, workforce supply pressures are limiting the capacity of headspace services to provide access to the evidence-based care that is required to ensure that young people are mentally healthy and able to participate both socially and economically.

A national survey of headspace centres in 2018 showed that 87 per cent of centres have difficulty attracting and retaining staff. Recruitment of youth workers and allied health staff, especially psychologists, is relatively more successful than recruitment of GPs and psychiatrists.

In particular, the headspace network has had difficulty:

- attracting GPs and GP registrars – in 2023, only 67 headspace centres (43 per cent) have access to a GP, and very few have a GP registrar
- recruiting healthcare workers from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and refugee and migrant backgrounds, to deliver culturally appropriate services for these population groups
- accessing private practitioners in outer regional, rural and remote areas.

Current funding models make it difficult for the community youth mental health sector to attract and retain staff.

headspace services operate with limited core operational and infrastructure funding, short term funding contracts, and a need to offer 'no gap' or low cost services to minimise financial barriers to accessing care. In contrast, many private providers charge private fees, deliver shorter consultations, and often have fewer 'do not attends' (due to charging cancellation fees). This makes it difficult for headspace and other community youth mental health services to compete with primary provider organisations or private practice, or to provide long-term job security.

Community youth mental health services need:

- an integrated sustainable workforce strategy across primary and tertiary sectors that is flexible to future emerging needs and evidence informed as to best outcomes for the serviced communities
- longer funding cycles, both from both Commonwealth and state and territory governments
- funding agreements with built-in annual CPI increases that keep pace with rising costs
- increased operational funding, to build the required 'wrap around' supports and integrated holistic models of care that include alcohol and other drug use and vocational supports; and to provide more opportunities for professional development.

headspace has established a number of workforce development programs to grow the youth mental health workforce and increase access to specialist expertise.

These developments include:

- the **NSW COVID-19 Recovery Program**. Funded by the NSW Government until June 2024 the program aims to improve workforce capacity, sustainability and integration within headspace centres, to support timely access to mental health care for young people across NSW. The program provides:
 - clinical placements for psychology, social work and occupational therapy students
 - GP and psychiatrist recruitment and retention initiatives
 - two-year pilot graduate program for social workers, occupational therapists and psychologists.
- the **headspace General Practitioner Registrar Pilot Program**. Funded by the Australian Government, the program supports GP Registrars to train at headspace and build capacity to provide appropriate, evidence-based care to young people. The pilot program has increased the number of headspace centres that have senior GP registrar undertaking extended skills training in youth mental health within a safe, appropriately supported and positive learning environment.
- the **headspace Early Career Program**. Funded by the Australian Government, the program provides student placements and a two-year graduate program in headspace centres in social work, occupational therapy and psychology disciplines. The program is currently operating in Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia (see case study below).

As outlined under Term of Reference (c), NSW Health is resourcing LHDs to provide specialist in-reach support to primary headspace services. Currently, many LHDs find it hard to recruit youth psychiatrist and other specialist youth mental health clinicians.

In these locations, headspace is working with NSW Health to adopt innovative alternatives to enable services to meet the needs of young people. In particular, **the headspace Telepsychiatry program** supports young people and headspace clinicians in rural and remote locations to access specialist, bulk-billed support. As an early intervention primary care platform, this access is critical to support young people presenting with higher acuity or more complex needs. Without it, more young people would need to be referred to costly tertiary services to receive appropriate care:

GPs and allied health teams...really benefit from earlier psychiatry input to diagnoses and assist in treatment plans...In this age group, there are less guidelines and less evidence-based choice of 2nd line medications, so specialist advice is critical. (headspace Bega)

The lack of quality and consistent specialist psychiatric care often leaves less qualified clinicians 'holding the ball' for the planning and delivery of specialist, high intensity intervention and treatment for clients with complex needs. This often means sitting with a high level of risk resulting in clinicians managing unsustainable workloads and contributing to burnout and turnover. (headspace Broken Hill)

Not having access to (psychiatry consults) would likely result in young people not obtaining critical care, deteriorating and presenting in crisis at the hospital further impacting the public system. The ability of clinicians to provide appropriate treatment and enable recovery would also be affected. (headspace clinician)

Case study relating to Terms of Reference (c) and (f)

headspace Early career program

The Early Career Program is designed to grow the youth mental health workforce and provide an immediate boost to service capacity. Under the program, students and graduates are placed in headspace centres, supported by clinical educators who provide supervision, training and support. The students and graduates deliver services to young people under supervision, and clinical educators lift the practice standards across centre services.

The Early career program has had a considerable impact on the headspace mental health workforce. Since commencement, 102 graduates have taken up roles and 402 students have completed placements across 48 headspace centres, all supported by clinical educators. These graduates and students have delivered over 23,000 occasions of service to young people.

Early evaluation findings indicate that the students and graduates feel well supported in their training and development, and are more inclined to pursue a career in youth mental health. Centres have valued the investment in clinical educators and the additional capacity to meet the needs of young people.

I was able to put my knowledge, experience and skills into practice with the help of a supportive environment. I have upskilled myself in many different sectors and learnt many things from the different multidisciplinary professions here. (ECP student)

Having Clinical educator positions has provided excellent resources to our centres to enable development of a more structured and planned student placement program. ... having someone dedicated to coordinate student placements as well as development of policies and procedures in relation to students and graduates. The dedicated coordinator has also enhanced our connections with education providers, previously this was ad hoc and not very structured. Graduates now have access to a wonderful education program, instead of being 'thrown in the deep end a bit' by being employed as an intake clinician. The fact that orientation is so thorough has meant that graduates can join the team with good knowledge and support immediately. There is less strain on centres to manage junior clinicians - adequate resourcing helps with clinical governance. (Centre Manager)

Term of reference (g) – current education and training programs for specialist clinicians and their sustainability to meet future needs, including:

(i) placements;

(ii) the way training is offered and overseen;

(v) how barriers to workforce expansion can be addressed to increase the supply, accessibility and affordability of specialist clinical services in healthcare workers.

Key takeaways

- Providing supported and supervised student placements and graduate programs in primary care settings like headspace provide benefits for students, graduates and services, creates positive early career experiences and in-sector retention, and is an effective approach to growing the youth mental health workforce.
- Using headspace's existing clinical education infrastructure, there is scope to increase the number of students and graduates supported in centres across the state.

Supporting health students, graduates and early career clinicians is critical to ensure the supply of a high quality workforce in future years. headspace has developed formal structures to provide a learning environment for students, graduates and early career workers, as they begin their careers and develop skills and capability in delivering services for young people.

With a holistic care approach, an emphasis on youth, family and friends participation, and low or no cost service delivery, the headspace model is innovative and unique. Combined with the safe and supportive environment, headspace provides a strong training ground for students, graduates and early career professionals. With the existing clinical education infrastructure, headspace centres across NSW have capacity to supervise additional students and graduates, across allied health and other disciplines.

Many headspace centres host students and graduates, including as part of the NSW COVID-19 Recovery Program. This program was funded by NSW Health to help centres meet demand following the pandemic, and has enabled headspace centres across the state to support students and graduates (see case study below).

To support students and graduates, headspace centres employ a clinical educator – often a senior clinician working part-time as an educator. The clinical educators supervise students and graduates, assisting them and other clinicians to translate theory into practice. In addition to clinical educators, headspace centres must also maintain integrity with the headspace model, providing effective, evidence-based care to young people. Combined, these elements ensure students and graduates can learn and develop in a safe and supportive environment.

For students, accessing clinical placements in a variety of settings allows them to gain broad experiences, to build a contemporary skill set, and exposes them to new career options. Placements in services such as headspace also prepare students to work in multi-disciplinary teams, a key approach in mental health service delivery.

Case study: NSW COVID-19 Recovery Program

The NSW COVID-19 Recovery Program aims to improve workforce capacity, sustainability and integration within headspace centres to support timely access to mental health care for young people across NSW. These aims are being achieved through clinical student placements (psychologists, social workers, and occupational therapists), as well as GP and psychiatrist recruitment and retention initiatives. The program was recently expanded to include a Pilot Graduate Program with three graduates having commenced supported early career placements in March 2023.

headspace National manages the program, providing guidance and resources to centres to support program establishment and student activities, and monitoring and evaluation. There are 38 participating centres across NSW, delivering activities in up to three interlinked streams.

The three program streams are:

Stream 1: Student placements and pilot graduate program

Students are supported to undertake clinical placements and deliver services under the supervision of their headspace centre. Graduates are employed by headspace National for two years, and complete two twelve-month secondments at headspace services. The program has supported a large increase in student placements in participating rural and regional centres. In 2022, a total of 58 students were placed across these centres.

headspace centres describe the benefits of the placement program:

The most exciting thing was we advertised for two positions in November and have now offered employment to two of these students. The advantage of employment students post placement is that they know our systems, have had their full placements with us, they know us, and it's a great entry for them to start their career.

Student involvement has allowed existing clinicians to focus on clients with more complex presentations, allowing the students to facilitate the low intensity sessions or groups. Students can assist with wellbeing checks for waitlisted clients, complete screenings and contribute towards community engagement.

Stream 2: GP Boost

GP capacity in centres is strengthened through improved recruitment and retention activities. Services may choose to implement a range of activities that enhance clinical and administrative support for GPs, team integration functions and education and training. When surveyed 85 per cent of centres agree that they have enhanced their clinical support as a result. Early outcomes show a positive trend towards increased supports and satisfaction for GPs.

The additional high level clinical skills (the GP provides) within the centre has added considerable expertise to our headspace centre team and service delivery more generally.

Our GP has reported feeling more connection to the team and feels safer as she is able to provide a clinical handover to the headspace team before her week ends.

Stream 3: Enhanced Psychiatry

Centres are supported to engage sessional psychiatrists to provide specialist support and oversight to headspace and the young people who access services. Centres can engage psychiatrists directly, through their LHDs or through the headspace Telepsychiatry program.

Psychiatry makes our centre a much more comprehensive and cohesive and well-resourced centre.

Telepsychiatry has enhanced the clinical care of young people, and increased clinical support and education for our GPs and team.

Term of reference (h) – new models of care and technical and clinical innovations to improve health outcomes for the people of NSW, including but not limited to technical and clinical innovation, changes to scope of practice, workforce innovation, and funding innovation

Key takeaways

- headspace has developed innovative online and telehealth programs to address workforce maldistribution and ensure young people in regional and rural areas of NSW have equitable access to specialist clinicians.
- headspace has also developed innovative, integrated approaches to support communities recover following natural disasters, using a combination of centre-based and digital services.

Innovative digital and telehealth approaches to the delivery of youth mental health services are vital for young people who cannot, or do not want to, access in-person services.

The availability of these options may overcome barriers to help seeking, such as the stigma and embarrassment that some people experience with face-to-face counselling. Telehealth and online services are also key to providing person-centred care: people should be able to access timely, quality support through the medium of their choice, whether that be in person or via phone, video, webchat, email or websites.

Beyond the benefits of digital services for young people, headspace's innovative digital programs have delivered key system advantages, including:

- **promoting access and equity in service delivery** – in rural and remote areas, in particular, it can be difficult for services to provide access to specialist clinical services, particularly for low prevalence but high impact disorders.
- **addressing workforce maldistribution** – as noted above, the mental health system is experiencing substantial workforce shortages, particularly in psychiatry. Many regional and rural headspace centres experience difficulties in attracting and retaining staff.
- **offering options to scale up as need arises** – with established infrastructure and governance (including clinical governance), headspace can rapidly leverage existing investment and increase capacity as needs arise in communities, particularly in response to national disasters.

headspace's innovative programs include:

- **headspace Telepsychiatry** – many headspace centres in rural and remote NSW do not have access to on-site psychiatrists. This service provides centres with access to psychiatrists for primary and secondary consultations, via video or telehealth. These services are bulk billed in recognition of the difficulty young people have in paying out-of-pocket expenses. The service also helps build the mental health capacity of the local workforce, by providing tailored psychiatrist supervision, case management advice and webinars on specific psychiatric topics. The service helps workers in regional and remote areas to feel supported in their work with young people with more complex or less common needs. Across New South Wales, 21 headspace centres and satellite services have access to headspace Telepsychiatry.
- **headspaceConnect** – this teleweb service seeks to minimise delays that young people may experience accessing services through the headspace service network. The service connects young people with a dedicated allied health clinician to provide treatment via telephone, video or webchat. The clinician provides one-to-one support, combined with additional resources including moderated online community support and digital resources. To date, the service has been delivered via three centres in regional areas of New South Wales (Dubbo, Bathurst and Orange). The program provides an accessible service for harder to reach young people who face barriers

accessing mental health services, and the young people who receive care via the program have experienced significant clinical improvements.

- **Partners in Parenting** – developed in collaboration with Monash University, this program offers an evidence-based online parenting program to help parents and carers build skills and confidence in supporting their high school-aged young people's mental health and wellbeing. The program covers common parenting challenges (such as communication, boundaries, conflicts and so on) and provides interactive modules for self-paced learning.

There is scope for NSW Health to invest further in innovative programs such as headspaceConnect, extending access to young people who are unable to access in-person services, mitigating workforce shortages, and providing equitable access to specialist services across regional and rural areas.

headspace has also developed an innovative, integrated approach to supporting communities following natural disasters.

headspace has over a decade of experience in this space and has supported communities across New South Wales following floods, bushfires and droughts.

headspace provides a rapid response in the days following a natural disaster. Local services will take steps to continue to be available to young people in the area, and headspace's online or telephone based services are also accessible for young people. This includes programs such as the Regional Phone Counselling Service, which provides counselling from credentialled clinicians for students who are missing out on necessary care, due to either location or the availability of clinicians.

In the weeks and months following, headspace will continue to support young people, prioritising initiatives led by the local community. This can include delivering trauma-informed mental health training, or programs to build community resilience. It can also involve working with local schools.

Mental health needs can also emerge over time following a natural disaster. For example, after the floods in the Northern Rivers region, the Lismore headspace centres found the young people coming to their centre were more socially isolated than they had been prior to the floods. This prompted the team to establish social groups, to provide opportunities for connection.

This holistic, integrated approach to recovery following natural disasters is unique, and builds on headspace's capacity to provide support for young people, families and communities across a range of settings.

Appendix: headspace services and programs

headspace provides early intervention mental health services to 12 to 25 year olds. headspace offers young people support across mental health, physical and sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, and work and study – providing an integrated service horizontally across these domains of care.

headspace has 45 centres across NSW, and in 2022/23 provided nearly 125,943 occasions of service to 27,053 young people attending these centres. In addition, 9,188 occasions of service were provided in person or online by headspace Work and Study programs.

Our integrated services provide the holistic, multi-faceted support that is a necessary component of a responsive service system model. This includes:

- **headspace centres:** the headspace network of more than 154 services are youth-friendly, integrated service hubs, where multidisciplinary teams provide holistic support across the four core streams.
- **community awareness:** guided by local youth reference groups and centre staff, Community Awareness Officers at each headspace centre work locally to build mental health literacy, reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking, identify local needs and ensure young people know they can access help at headspace.
- **digital mental health programs and resources:** headspace uses its digital platform to make a range of information and supports accessible to young people, parents and carers, professionals and educators.
- **ehespace:** our virtual service provides safe, secure support to young people and their family and friends from experienced youth mental health professionals via email, webchat or phone. There are also online group sessions led by clinicians or peers, focused on the big issues facing young people and their family and friends.
- **headspace campaigns:** campaigns focus on stigma reduction, building mental health literacy and encouraging help seeking, while ensuring young people know headspace is a safe and trusted place they can turn to in order to support their mental health.
- **headspace in schools and universities:** Through evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention and postvention services, headspace delivers key initiatives designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of school communities. This includes:
 - Be You – a mental health and wellbeing initiative for learning communities. In particular, headspace can support secondary schools to prepare for, respond to and recover together where there has been a death by suicide.
 - Mental Health Education Program – this program provides free mental health education workshops for schools
 - University support program – this provides training and education opportunities to Australian universities to build their capacity and confidence to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing
 - Community Collaboratives – working with NSW local communities that have been impacted by suicide (see table 1 for more details).
- **programs and resources to support hard-to-reach cohorts of young people:** these include
 - **Visible project** – a community based initiative using artwork as a form of community engagement and awareness.
 - **Yarn Safe** – mental health and wellbeing resources and support for First Nations young people.
- **vocational supports:** headspace centres provide integrated mental health and vocational support to young people to help them remain engaged in work and study, including implementing

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in headspace centres. In addition, headspace provides vocational support via:

- **headspace Work and Study Online** (hWS) is a national digital program that provides integrated mental health and vocational support via the phone, video conferencing, online messaging and email. hWS works closely with young people across their work/study journey from identifying work/study goals to maintaining a work/study placement, typically for a period of around three months.
- **headspace Career Mentoring** connects young people aged 18 to 25 years living with mental health challenges with industry professionals to meet fortnightly over a period of six months via video conferencing and/or the phone to enhance a young person’s employment and career opportunities.

Some headspace services provide two additional in-person programs:

- **Early Psychosis Program** – this program is delivered via three centres in NSW, and in 2022/23 provided 89,110 occasions of service (including direct and indirect) to 550 young people..
- **Work and Study (Individual Placement and Support)** – this is delivered in 14 centres and provided 5,585 occasions of service to 712 young people in 2022/23.

Young people in NSW also receive care via headspace’s digital service delivery. In 2022/23, 3,396 service users accessed **ehespace**, receiving 9,661 occasions of service. In addition, 606 young people experiencing mental health challenges accessed **headspace Work and Study Online** receiving 3,603 sessions.

Online Communities provide safe, supportive and meaningful ways for young people and their families to connect with their peers, in real-time and on topics that are important to them. Peer support chats run Monday to Thursday and are led by our Online Peer Support Workforce who create a welcoming and inclusive space for connection through the sharing of lived experience. In 2022/23, Online Peer Group Chats run by peer support moderators were attended 4,662 times nationally.

NSW Government funded programs

To boost capacity, headspace has worked with the NSW Government to deliver a range of programs. These programs are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: headspace programs in NSW

Program	Investment and timing	Description
NSW Community Collaboratives and Community Grants	\$3m, 2022 - 2024	This is an initiative to empower local communities that have been impacted by suicide deaths to come together. The Collaborative model is an all age and all stage approach in assisting high risk and vulnerable communities in NSW to recover and prepare from suicide through the establishment and development of community collaborations, in partnership with Lifeline Australia Suicide. This initiative is funded under the NSW Government’s Towards Zero Suicides initiative.
NSW Parent/Carer Information Sessions	\$1.17m, 2021 - 2022 (now complete)	When the NSW Collaboratives were funded early 2021, headspace was also funded to deliver 200 information sessions to NSW parent/carer in 10-12 regions across the state. This was designed to support the work of the Collaboratives and other identified emerging risk areas.

Program	Investment and timing	Description
NSW 2021 Storm and Flood Recovery Package: Schools Resilience Program	\$3.5m, 2022 - 2024	This project is to support and guide schools and communities through short, medium and long-term recovery trajectories following disaster events. Activities are based on trauma-informed practice relevant to natural disaster mental health training, service support, suicide prevention and community resilience.
NSW 2022 Flood Support: Recovery to Resilience Program	\$3.5m, 2022 – 2024	This program is supporting communities that have been impacted by natural disaster, particularly in the Northern Rivers region. The program enhances and strengthens collaboration, activation, and integration of available services, supports, strategies, resources, and approaches. Its focus is primarily on mental health, safety, and wellbeing.
NSW COVID-19 Response	\$3.5m, 2022 – 2023	This initiative delivered increased services at headspace centres; promotion of headspace services and supports to young people and families; and parent and career information sessions. The response was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and NSW governments.
NSW COVID-19 Recovery Program	\$20m, 2022 – 2024	This funding is to commission new headspace centres and to deliver a recovery program for young people. The program provides young people with timely access to mental health support, by boosting workforce capacity and integration at headspace centres across the state. headspace funded four streams of activity: student placements; boost in GP capacity; enhancing psychiatry; and a pilot graduate program.
NSW Regional Telephone School support (Northern Rivers and Western NSW)	\$0.8m, 2022 – 2022	This initiative provided counselling services to flood-impacted schools in the Northern Rivers region, as well as schools in western areas of the state.