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Young People Speak Out on Mental Health

Young Canberrans call for earlier education, people in key roles to develop their skills and knowledge, and more timely responses to help seeking to address ongoing concern about mental health in our community.

Canberra's peak body for youth affairs, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, has released a report on the findings from conversations with young people aged 12-25 that aimed to better understand why mental health continues to rate in the top concerns for young Australians, and what young people identify is needed to support mental health and wellbeing in the ACT.

'Discussions with young people were both inspiring and worrying,' said Dylan Appelqvist, a young Canberran involved in the consultations. 'Inspiring, because many wanted to be informed about mental health issues to help friends, family and themselves. However, it was also worrying. Some individuals misunderstood mental health as illness and this is a concern as it suggests some young people are not well informed.'

Despite acknowledgement that current growth in health spending in the Territory is unsustainable, most announcements ahead of Tuesday's ACT Government Budget release have so far focussed on increased investment in tertiary health responses.

'While the Youth Coalition welcomes the announcement of extra hospital beds, the message from young Canberrans is that they want to see investment in education, early intervention and prevention when it comes to their health and wellbeing,' said Emma Robertson, Director of the Youth Coalition. 'This goes beyond any one portfolio and requires a coordinated response from health, education, community services and planning.'

Young people drew comparison to what they are taught about physical health from an early age and suggested that similar messaging about mental health and wellbeing could be an effective way to promote positive practices among young people of all ages.

Participants also suggested there were key people in the community they believe need to develop their skills and knowledge to help support young people to be mentally healthy, in particular, teachers, employers and doctors.

'Local youth mental health services have reported an increase in referrals throughout this year, and are struggling to meet demand,' said Ms Robertson. 'With one in four young people

likely to experience issues with mental health in any given year, and 75% of people with mental illness experiencing emergence prior to the age of 25, we need to respond early.'

'We must ensure that experiencing mental ill health or illness does not result in barriers to young people's social and economic participation, particularly in respect to engaging with education, transitions to employment and developing support networks.'

Young participants emphasised the need for help to be accessible when sought, identifying that long wait lists can act as a barrier to young people getting help and seeking help in the future.

'Early intervention can be a life-changing part of young people's recovery journeys,' said Rachael Stevens, young Canberran, and mental health advocate. 'This report shows that there are solutions to this complex issue. Young people can get better, recover and live incredible lives not limited or confined by mental illness. There is hope for young people's futures.'

For further comment please contact Emma Robertson on 0422 665 469

Young people who were involved in the project are also available for comment