

Youth Justice Mental Health Initiative (YJMHI)

What is the YJMHI?

The YJMHI aims to:

- improve access of young people involved with the Youth Justice program to an appropriate level of mental health treatment and care
- enhance capacity of youth justice staff and mental health staff to respond to young people involved with the Youth Justice program who require mental health services

The YJMHI forms a key aspect of the vulnerable youth outreach element of the redesigned child and adolescent mental health service system. The YJMHI offers an opportunity to address some of the barriers that young people involved with the Youth Justice program face in receiving appropriate mental health treatment and care.

The YJMHI also enables service enhancement by building on existing youth justice health services in order to provide a more comprehensive and targeted mental health care response to young people involved in the Youth Justice program.

YJMHI clinicians

To achieve the above aims, the YJMHI has established:

- four community positions, one in each of Eastern, Southern and North and West metropolitan regions (2009-10) and one community position in the Hume region (2010-11)
- a coordinator position within Forensicare, which provides a coordinating function for the initiative and supplements mental health services within Victoria's Youth Justice custodial centres (2010-11)
- an Aboriginal YJMHI position which enables greater, targeted mental health support to young Aboriginal people involved with the Youth Justice program (2010-11).

Outcomes

The following outcomes are expected from the YJMHI:

- earlier intervention in development and episode at all levels of severity of mental health, and in co-occurring mental health and substance misuse problems for young people involved with the Youth Justice program
- improved access to appropriate levels of mental health care for young people involved with the Youth Justice program
- earlier identification and intervention in co-occurring mental health and substance misuse problems (dual diagnosis) young people involved with the Youth Justice program

- improved social functioning, educational engagement and life chances for young people involved with the Youth Justice program
- improved understanding and responsiveness of youth justice staff to the needs of young people with mental health concerns
- improved understanding and responsiveness of mental health staff to the needs of young people with forensic issues.

Key features

The YJMHI provides the following services:

- primary and secondary consultation to youth justice staff on issues related to mental health
- secondary consultation to mental health service staff on needs of young people involved with the Youth Justice program with forensic issues
- provision of education and training to mental health and youth justice staff on relevant topics
- system and network development, including actively seeking the engagement of the mental health service system to facilitate improved treatment services for young people involved in the Youth Justice program
- establishment and maintenance of effective referral pathways into the mental health service system for young people involved in the Youth Justice program
- brief focused treatment or 'mental health' case management of a small number of for young people involved in the Youth Justice program.

Guiding operating principles

The YHMI operates on a shared understanding between mental health and youth justice services.

- Young people involved in the Youth Justice program require the same access to mental health services as others in the community with a similar disorder and a young person's offending behaviour or co-occurring issues should not exclude them from mental health treatment.
- Young people involved in the Youth Justice program are more likely to experience mental health problems than the general community.
- Youth justice and mental health services need to improve collaboration to manage the shared care of young people involved in the Youth Justice program with mental health issues.
- It is challenging to engage young people involved with the Youth Justice program in mental health care, especially those with multiple complex needs, as this client group typically have poorer health seeking behaviours.
- Young people involved in the Youth Justice program require a flexible and proactive approach to treatment due to high levels of behaviours such as poor impulse control and substance use.

Target group

The target group for the YJMHI is young people involved with the Youth Justice program that have mental health problems or mental illness or are at risk of mental illness and where their behaviour is characterised by high prevalence disorders such as mood and/or anxiety disorders, psychosis, or a history of involvement with area mental health services.

Young people within this target group will require assistance to link in with area mental health services, a general practitioner or local health services provider, or navigation of the mental health service system including advocacy with mental health services.

Exclusions

The Adolescent Forensic Health Service (AFHS), The Royal Children's Hospital, provides forensic assessment and intervention for young people aged 10-21 years who are involved with the Youth Justice program and are serious and persistent offenders, are mandated by the courts to forensic intervention programs, and have mental health issues directly relating to offending behaviour.

There is significant collaboration between the YJMHI and AFHS in the delivery of mental health services to young people involved with the Youth Justice program.

Referral process

Referrals to the YJMHI are initiated by the regional Youth Justice worker as part of the case planning process. The Youth Justice worker will discuss the nature of the referral with the young person and gain informed consent to refer the young person to the YJMHI clinician. All referrals to the YJMHI must be endorsed by the relevant regional Youth Justice Manager (or delegate).

The exchange of information between Youth Justice and YJMHI must comply with relevant statutory requirements including, but not limited to, the provisions of the Department of Human Services Information Privacy Policy, the Victorian Health Records Act 2001. For more information see the Department of Human Services website at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/privacy and <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthrecords/>

Implementation and monitoring

A central reference led the development and implementation of the initiative and continues to provide advice, monitor progress, and address emerging issues.

Further information

For further information on the **policy and program aspects** of the Youth Justice Mental Health Initiative, please contact Usha Mudaliar, Senior Project Manager, Department of Health, (usha.mudaliar@health.vic.gov.au) or Tina Gee, Senior Program Advisor, Department of Human Services, (tina.gee@dhs.vic.gov.au)

For further information on the **operational aspects** of the Youth Justice Mental Health Initiative, please contact the YJMHI clinician at the relevant health service.

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