

30 April 2020

## Feedback for National Mental Health Commission – Building social cohesion

### ***Ensure national coordination of service provision***

The Federal Government's initial package of funding was very appropriately focused upon a national crisis response to the pandemic, using levers which are under the control of the Commonwealth.

The next phase needs to be focused on the medium to longer term needs of the community and therefore has to be more granular in approach, providing a network of services and supports which are designed to meet local needs.

That means the Commonwealth coordinating with states and territories, and with national and/or state-wide NGOs at the jurisdictional level, and Primary Health Networks and LHNs coordinating together at the regional level with NGOs in their geographical patches.

The notion that such a joint approach with NGOs is somehow a conflict of interest because they are also service providers needs to be "parked" for now – after all, LHNs are service providers too. In times of extended crisis, all hands will be needed on deck.

### ***Build a responsive health system that is truly person led***

#### ***Address the root causes of mental health issues***

#### ***Invest in early intervention and prevention***

#### ***Expand community based mental health care***

Regional and local action needs to provide a comprehensive response over an extended period of time: different people respond to different services and supports, and "recover" or build resilience in different ways.

What we do know is that building social cohesion – reducing social isolation – works. The evidence is clear that this needs to go beyond telephone calls and text messages to intentional peer to peer support which makes people feel less alone, builds resilience, self esteem and self worth, enabling people to form relationships and build community.

We have seen in this time of **Physical distancing** the efforts which so many people have put into building their local community – from their balconies, on the footpaths, from their driveways. As we go through the next phases of **Standing down**, **Targeted action**, and **Long-term recovery** we need those efforts ramped up at the local level – not to dissipate.

It is by building a caring and sharing community at the local level and maintaining that community over the long term that people with mental health problems, who often feel isolated anyway, and those with emerging problems due to the pandemic, can be supported to build resilience and coping skills, helping people to recover, keeping them out of hospital, taking their medication, reducing suicidality and helping them gain and retain education and employment.

Funding needs to be provided for specific projects and programs which can support building social cohesion – building community or social capital – at that local level.

David Butt  
**National CEO**  
GROW Australia