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Community Connections program

Aboriginal Consultation Summary Report

February 2021

Introduction

Community Connections (CC) is a new program for Aboriginal people in South Australia aged 18 to 49 years (or 64 years for non-Aboriginal people) whose social and emotional wellbeing is at risk because they are socially isolated and disconnected from community and critical health and social services.

Community Connections is the result of reforming the legacy Home and Community Care (HACC) program in 2020, which identified a service gap for people whose needs are not met by federal schemes like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or My Aged Care. The new program is designed to enhance people's independence and strengthen their connections with communities, social networks and services.

In October 2020, the Department of Human Services (DHS) engaged Arabana* Aboriginal woman and consultant Lorraine Merrick to undertake consultation with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) to better understand the unique needs of Aboriginal people eligible for the program.

This summary report is informed by a comprehensive consultation report produced by Lorraine Merrick.

Consultation

The scope of the consultation included ACCOs and ACCHOs currently funded under the HACC program, including those located in areas of high disadvantage that deliver similar social, wellbeing and disability support services.

Consultation took place from October 2020 to January 2021. Meetings were held with 14 organisations in metropolitan Adelaide, Murray Bridge, Port Lincoln, Whyalla, Oodnadatta, Ceduna, Mount Gambier and Coober Pedy.

* Arabana is also known as Arabunna



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While mainstream HACC providers were not included in this targeted consultation, they were engaged in sector consultation throughout 2020. Their rich and detailed feedback on client needs of Aboriginal people informed and shaped the development of the Community Connections program.

Key findings

The consultation confirmed findings from earlier consultations with HACC providers – that social isolation and disconnection from community and services is a significant risk factor for people not eligible for NDIS or aged care support.

It highlighted cultural disconnection as a further concern for Aboriginal people. Those at particular risk of social isolation and disconnection are aged between 18 and 35 years. The challenges for services are building rapport and trust after initial connection, and having culturally safe and appropriate services or activities to refer them to that provide opportunities to build supportive social networks.

Although not within the scope of the CC program, the most consistently raised issue was the crucial need to increase support for people to navigate and access “complex and difficult” systems such as the NDIS and Aged Care services.

Current needs and service gaps

Consultation revealed common client needs and services gaps across metropolitan and regional communities:

Support accessing culturally safe services, programs and activities

There is a need to support people to navigate and connect with local, specialised or mainstream services and systems, and community groups, activities and programs that are culturally safe. It was reported that many Aboriginal people are missing out on supports due to mistrust of mainstream services, service discrimination and racism, lack of accessible information, and confusion on eligibility. Organisations highlighted the value of having a one-stop shop or key worker to provide advice and assistance, preferably with regular outreach to sites or services people feel comfortable and safe accessing.

Assertive engagement and support to younger people with complex needs

There is a need for increased service focus on people aged 18 to 35, particularly younger people aged 18 to 25 with complex needs who are often too old for youth programs. Many are socially isolated and disconnected from culture, sleeping rough and at risk of homelessness. This is particularly the case for people experiencing severe mental health and/or alcohol and drug issues who are disengaged from health and social services.



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Several organisations commented that many young people who have previously been supported through the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program do not receive further support to undertake NDIS assessments.

Support to build independent living skills

There is a need to provide greater support to enhance independent living skills and nutrition and hygiene knowledge, particularly for younger people aged 18 to 25.

Social opportunities for young parents

There is a need for more opportunities for young parents who are socially isolated to meet with other young parents and receive peer support, particularly while their children are at playgroup.

Better access to transport

There is a need for improved access to transport, especially in regional and remote areas where access to public transport is limited and private ownership of vehicles is low. The main reasons for requiring transport are to attend appointments, pick up medication, shopping and/or attend community events.

Access to a drop-in centres and community hubs

Several organisations highlighted the need for a culturally safe social space in their local community for people to meet informally and build social relations. They reported that numerous people, including carers, remained socially isolated due to the lack of appropriate services. One of the cited examples was a man who would ring an ACCHO worker every day for a chat to reduce the profound loneliness he was experiencing.

Considerations for Community Connection program Guidelines

The importance of a flexible approach in delivering the CC program to Aboriginal people was repeatedly emphasised during consultations. The following were highlighted as specific concerns for program delivery and for consideration in the program guidelines:

- There is a reported lack of appropriate, culturally safe aged care facilities and services in some regions for Aboriginal people aged over 50 years. ACCHOs reported that some mainstream facilities are difficult to engage with due to racism and discrimination of race and age. Consideration will need to be given to ensure an effective transition into the aged care system occurs.



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- That people experiencing significant social and cultural disconnection who will benefit from persistent, assertive engagement can access longer term support (not time limited).

Promising interventions

Drawing on their experiences working with Aboriginal people, ACCOs and ACCHOs identified the following service responses and activities as effective ways to address client needs and service gaps:

- Strengthening or expanding existing Aboriginal-led social and cultural inclusion group activities such as Women's Art Workshops, Women's Yarning Network, Walking Groups, Healing Circles, Men's Sheds, Community Gardens and team sport community events.
- Providing transport for people to connect with critical services and participate in community programs and group activities.
- Creating a culturally safe, welcoming social space for people to meet and build supportive social networks. This has included a drop-in centre, community hub or dedicated room serving as a one-stop shop for advice and resources about local, specialised or mainstream services and systems, and community groups, activities and programs.
- Providing assertive outreach to people particularly those who are couch surfing and rough sleeping.
- Facilitating group camps on country, especially for younger people who are socially isolated and disconnected from culture. These have previously been run by local Elders and senior community members to build social connections, confidence and cultural identity. One such example is a three-day fishing trip to the Coorong.
- Developing volunteer opportunities in the workplace to increase socialising and employment pathways.

Conclusion

While it is evident that there is strong alignment between the new CC program service model and the promising interventions identified through consultation, DHS recognises the need for a flexible service model to allow for alternative responses that also achieve the overarching program outcomes of Aboriginal people.

The key findings in this summary report, and other insights from Lorraine's Merricks's full consultation report will inform the draft CC program Guidelines. It will include important



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cultural considerations for supporting Aboriginal people and how DHS will procure for the delivery of the CC program by ACCOs and ACCHOs on 1 July 2021.

Furthermore, DHS will highlight the service system issues identified in this consultation to relevant Commonwealth partners, particularly the difficulties for Aboriginal people accessing and navigating the NDIS and Aged Care services.

For further information or enquires please email CommunityConnections@sa.gov.au

