

THE PSYCHOLOGY FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA

(Incorporated in New South Wales)

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8 March 2012

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Re: Ten year Roadmap for Mental Health Reform Draft #4

The Psychology Foundation of Australia is a grouping of research-oriented university Schools of Psychology that was created to promote high standards in the education of psychologists and a scientific basis for professional practice.

We welcome this opportunity to provide input to the design of the future for mental health planning and delivery processes for the next decade. Overall the document is quite comprehensive and there are many admirable goals expressed in the document. Our contribution is intended to make a practical link between where the field currently sits and where the roadmap indicates we would like it to be. All 5 of the key directions listed are worthy goals. However, in each case there are presumed links between the achievement of the goals and the processes listed under them. The links may be valid but they are not always demonstrably so and this leads to our suggestion. For example, Key direction 1 highlights the need to tackle stigma and explicitly lists the intention to educate the public the help diminish this problem. The assumption appears to be that when people understand to nature of mental disorders they will be less likely to stigmatise those who have these difficulties. Unfortunately current data indicate that stigmatising behaviours are highest amongst Mental Health workers who are presumably best informed (for a review see Corrigan, P.W & Shapiro, J.R. Measuring the impact of programs that challenge the public stigma of mental illness. *Clinical Psychology Review* 30 (2010) 907–922). The best method to deliver an educational programme is therefore an area that still needs research. More generally, all initiatives to be driven by the Roadmap need to be informed by existing research evidence or new evidence collected to address gaps in our current knowledge.

We applaud the recognition already given in the draft Roadmap to the importance of providing services supported by evidence (Key Direction 5, dot point 4). However we consider this principle to be a critical one that deserves greater prominence in the Roadmap. Policies and interventions designed to assess, prevent, treat and manage mental illness should be based on the best available research evidence regarding their effectiveness, in order to ensure the most effective and efficient delivery of services. We therefore recommend that a commitment to evidence-based reform be added to the list of principles to guide National Mental Health Reform in Appendix 1, as follows:

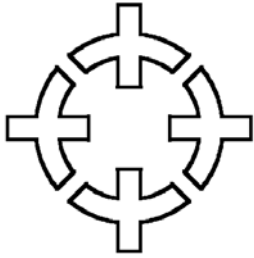
Agreed principle	Why is this important?
Commit to evidence-based reform of mental health policy and practice	Evidence-based policies and interventions will ensure the highest standards of mental health care and the most efficient use of scarce health resources

We also suggest changing Key Direction 2, dot point 1, to:

Increase access to evidence-based early intervention and support

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and changing Key Direction 5, dot point 6, to:

Implement nationally consistent legislation in relation to rights and standards of evidence-based training and practice

Finally, we recommend that the Roadmap explicitly incorporate the importance of conducting new research to inform policy and practice. If Australia is to move towards the goals expressed in the key directions then both the quantity and the spread of the areas of active research will need substantial growth over current baselines. Furthermore, much of this research will need to be conducted within Australia to take account of local circumstances directly relevant to most of the key directions. A successful outcome will depend on research addressing these issues in order to determine efficient solutions.

Accordingly, we suggest an additional dot point under Key Direction 1:

- Promote research into the most effective means to promote mental health, to manage mental disorder, and to maximise the effectiveness of services

We would be happy to discuss additional detail for each key direction when the plan is being developed into a more detailed document outlining how the goals will be achieved.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

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