

**Submission
No 57**

OPTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: headspace National

Date Received: 12 September 2024

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Mr Alex Greenwich MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing
NSW Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Lodged via Committee website

Dear Mr Greenwich

Re: Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your inquiry into options for essential worker housing in New South Wales. As a provider of services across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas, headspace welcomes this inquiry as an opportunity to increase access to housing for essential workers across the state.

About headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, providing early intervention mental health services to 12 to 25 year olds. headspace has 163 services across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas (including 50 in New South Wales) and offers online and phone support services and digital resources through eheadspace. headspace provides multidisciplinary care for mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drug use, and work and study needs. More information about headspace programs is provided in Attachment 1.

Mental health workforce challenges

In common with health and social care service sectors nationally, mental health is facing acute workforce shortages and long-term under-resourcing at a time when demand and complexity are growing year-on-year. Workforce supply pressures are limiting the capacity of headspace services to provide access to the evidence-based care that is required to ensure that young people are mentally healthy and able to participate both socially and economically.

Many headspace centres are unable to recruit psychologists, general practitioners, social workers and occupational therapists in particular, as well as youth and peer workers. This directly impacts on the quality and accessibility of youth mental health services.

The impact of limited housing on headspace services

In regional, rural and remote areas, access to appropriate and affordable housing is a significant barrier to attracting and retaining staff – particularly in attracting younger, earlier career workers. Limited housing stock, increasing demand, and rising rents all contribute to the challenge.

To boost service capacity and build the youth mental health workforce, headspace has established the **Early Career Program**. As part of this initiative, allied health students and graduates are placed and supported in headspace centres, including regional and rural placements. Once a graduate has experienced a non-metropolitan placement, they are often inclined to stay in regional and rural areas, reinforcing the benefits of investing in their initial relocation.

Under the program, headspace offers generous support for graduates who relocate or take up roles in remote areas. The program team also reach out to various housing stakeholders (service worker accommodation, local government housing, student accommodation, rural health bodies, local real estate agencies and so on) to check on housing availability and, where possible, secure accommodation options for graduates. This has been somewhat successful in locating temporary housing (up to four months) but not longer term options.

Despite these arrangements, finding appropriate and affordable accommodation for graduates has been a key barrier to recruiting staff in these areas. Strong competition for rental accommodation means graduates may need to live in temporary accommodation for extended periods of time, or stay in unstable and competitive share housing arrangements. In addition, increasing rental prices are compounded by lower salaries for not-for-profit health workers compared to many for-profit workers.

Defining an essential worker

headspace strongly recommends that the Committee include staff of mental health services delivered by not-for-profit organisations in the definition of essential workers, and that these staff benefit from opportunities to increase housing supply for essential workers that may be offered to staff of government-funded health and mental health services. Both groups of workers deliver essential services across the state, and both face similar challenges in securing appropriate and affordable housing.

Further, excluding staff of not-for-profit organisations from a definition of 'essential worker' risks exacerbating the situation for this cohort. Incentives or other arrangements that prioritise housing for government-employed workers can mean there is no appropriate housing stock for not-for-profit staff, and further compound the difficulty to recruiting and retaining staff in these areas.

headspace would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission, and opportunities to address the challenges of securing appropriate and affordable housing for staff of headspace and other not-for-profit services.

Yours sincerely



Jason Trethowan

Chief Executive Officer

Attachment 1: headspace programs and services

headspace provides early intervention mental health services to 12 to 25 year olds. headspace offers young people support across mental health, physical and sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, and work and study – providing an integrated service horizontally across these domains of care.

Our integrated services provide the holistic, multi-faceted support that is a necessary component of a responsive service system model. This includes:

- **headspace centres:** the headspace network of services are youth-friendly, integrated service hubs, where multidisciplinary teams provide holistic support across the four core streams.
- **community awareness:** guided by local youth reference groups and centre staff, Community Awareness Officers at each headspace centre work locally to build mental health literacy, reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking, identify local needs and ensure young people know they can access help at headspace.
- **digital mental health programs and resources:** headspace uses its digital platform to make a range of information and supports accessible to young people, parents and carers, professionals and educators.
- **ehespace:** our virtual service provides safe, secure support to young people and their family and friends from experienced youth mental health professionals via email, webchat or phone. There are also online group sessions led by clinicians or peers, focused on the big issues facing young people and their family and friends.
- **headspace regional telephone counselling service:** headspace offers integrated holistic teleweb support for students in eligible schools in regional Victoria (locations more than 50km from a headspace centre).
- **headspace campaigns:** campaigns focus on stigma reduction, building mental health literacy and encouraging help seeking, while ensuring young people know headspace is a safe and trusted place they can turn to in order to support their mental health.
- **headspace in schools and universities:** Through evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention and postvention services, headspace delivers key initiatives designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of school communities. This includes:
 - **Be You** – a mental health and wellbeing initiative for learning communities. In particular, headspace can support secondary schools to prepare for, respond to and recover together where there has been a death by suicide.
 - **Mental Health Education Program** – this program provides free mental health education workshops for schools
 - **University support program** – this provides training and education opportunities to Australian universities to build their capacity and confidence to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing
- **programs and resources to support hard-to-reach cohorts of young people:** these include
 - **Visible project** – a community based initiative using artwork as a form of community engagement and awareness.
 - **Yarn Safe** – mental health and wellbeing resources and support for First Nations young people.
- **vocational supports:** headspace centres provide integrated mental health and vocational support to young people to help them remain engaged in work and study, including implementing Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in headspace centres. In addition, headspace provides vocational support via:
 - **headspace Work and Study Online (hWS)** is a national digital program that provides integrated mental health and vocational support via the phone, video conferencing, online

messaging and email. hWS works closely with young people across their work/study journey from identifying work/study goals to maintaining a work/study placement, typically for a period of around three months.

- **headspace Career Mentoring** connects young people aged 18 to 25 years living with mental health challenges with industry professionals to meet fortnightly over a period of six months via video conferencing and/or the phone to enhance a young person's employment and career opportunities.