

Youth Mental Health – An Invitation To Visit A Success Story

Submission From ORYGEN Research Centre To Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
27th April 2005

Summary

1. This is an initial submission on youth mental health made to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health on behalf of ORYGEN Research Centre. ORYGEN, which is a specialist youth mental health service and innovation centre based in Melbourne, will be making a detailed submission prior to the May 13th deadline. ORYGEN is the only specialist youth mental health service of its type in Australia. ORYGEN is supported by both federal and state government funding, by philanthropic gifts, by corporate grants and sponsorships and by the academic infrastructure of a major university. ORYGEN invites the Senate Select Committee to visit our service and to meet with our young clients and their families and with our internationally admired clinical and research teams. Such a visit would provide members of the Select Committee with both a unique insight into youth mental health issues and an understanding of some of the latest, most successful interventions that have been proven to benefit young people.

About ORYGEN

2. ORYGEN is the only specialist youth mental health service of its type in Australia and has a worldwide reputation for excellence. ORYGEN's core competency is the development, implementation and dissemination of best practice in youth mental health.
3. ORYGEN provides mental health services to young people in the North West area of Melbourne through its clinical program funded by Victorian State Government. The catchment area for ORYGEN's clinical service (operated through Melbourne Health) has a total population of about 900,000, with approximately 120,000 young people in its target age group of 15-25. ORYGEN provides services to up to 800 young people with severe mental disorders each year.
4. ORYGEN conducts an extensive program of research through the ORYGEN Research Centre, a private, not-for-profit company which has the University of Melbourne, Melbourne Health and the Colonial Foundation as its member organisations. The \$30 million research investment that ORYGEN Research Centre currently manages underpins major state, national and international initiatives in youth mental health service innovation.
5. ORYGEN manages a number of federally funded projects including multi-million dollar grants from the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation. Notable fields of research currently being pursued by ORYGEN include improving vocational outcomes for young people in mental health services, building an effective integrated model of care between mental health and drug and alcohol services, enhancing suicide prevention strategies for young people and a range of treatment trials and neuroscience projects.
6. ORYGEN supports the widespread adoption of its innovations through initiatives such as managing the International Early Psychosis Association and being the lead support and training agency for early psychosis services across Australia. Teams from around the world visit ORYGEN throughout the year to learn how to implement similar youth mental health initiatives in their home countries.
7. ORYGEN was responsible for initiating the now-worldwide focus on early psychosis and is currently expanding its clinical and research expertise into other youth disorders. ORYGEN's 240 staff (180 EFT) have leading knowledge of early psychosis, mood, substance use, eating and personality disorders.
8. ORYGEN works in partnership with other agencies on mental health promotion and mental health literacy initiatives. The pioneering team behind the internationally influential Mental Health First Aid program is also based in ORYGEN.
9. ORYGEN is a youth focused service that involves young people and their families in a meaningful manner in its work. ORYGEN has pioneered an award winning youth participation model that involves young clients and former clients in key activities of the organisation (including participation in recruitment panels, editorial for publications, client-feedback, peer-support and project committees).
10. ORYGEN is a unique integrated clinical, research and translation service with a proven track record of achievement. ORYGEN believes that the benefits of the latest knowledge about youth mental health should be made available to young people across Australia through nationwide access to youth appropriate mental health services. **It respectfully requests that the Senate Select Committee makes such a recommendation in its final report**

Youth Mental Health – The Context

11. Mental health issues are responsible for 55% of the overall burden of disease for young people between 15-24ⁱ. One in four young people in this age group will experience a mental disorder in any 12 month periodⁱⁱ.
12. Existing Commonwealth Government policy articulates the need to address youth mental health as a priority area:
 - “Three quarters of mental health problems begin before the age of 25 years of age. Early intervention to address mental health problems in young people is vital.” *Prime Minister John Howard 29/09/04.*
 - “It is clear that early intervention to address mental health as well as addiction issues in young people is vital if we are to give all young Australians the best chance of leading happy and productive lives.” *Howard Government Election Policy.*
13. Youth is not only the peak period for the onset of psychiatric illness; it is also a complex and often precarious phase in the life cycle for psychological and social development. Evidence^{iii, iv, v} demonstrates significant benefits from a separate system of youth psychiatry, a guiding principle by which ORYGEN operates.
14. Treatments have never been better - if treated appropriately and early, a young person has excellent prospect for a happy and healthy life. Early case identification and intensive treatment of the emerging disorder has been shown to reduce the need for inpatient treatment and is associated with better outcomes and subsequent cost reductions for the health care system^{vi}.
15. Despite this, young people's overwhelming health issues – mental health and related alcohol and substance abuse – are generally inadequately and inappropriately catered for in Australia. Limited mental health literacy in the general population and underdeveloped mental health capacity in the primary care sector often prevent young people with emerging mental illnesses from getting adequate help early. As a result, mental illnesses in many young people will become more serious and require specialist interventions.
16. Specialist interventions required by young people with serious mental illness are often unavailable or inappropriate. Most young people in Australia with serious mental illnesses will have access only to child or adult services that are not designed to meet all of the unique challenges faced by young people. Instead, they focus on the needs of younger children or chronically unwell adults. Due to resource restrictions, ORYGEN is able to treat only 40% of the 2,000 young people referred to it each year. Even though research shows ORYGEN correctly targets those ‘most in need’, a substantial number of very unwell young people have to be turned away. Almost two thirds of those not admitted to ORYGEN have at least one mental illness and nearly one in four of this group have made a suicide attempt in the previous year.^{vii}
17. The lack of appropriate care has long-term negative consequences for young people, their families and the Australian community as a whole. It should be noted that untreated mental disorder in young people is the principal threat to their vocational attainment, with many progressing to disability support pensions (DSPs)^{viii}.

Invitation

18. ORYGEN invites the Senate Select Committee to visit our service. ORYGEN's clinical and research staff, our young clients and their families will be happy to meet with committee members and answer any of their questions. We can tailor the content of such a visit to highlight the areas requested by the committee. Potential areas that could be addressed include key components of a youth appropriate service, involving young people and their families, suicide prevention, substance abuse, maximising vocational outcomes, mental health first aid, mental health promotion, workforce development initiatives, information on specific disorders, a summary of latest research findings and a plan for building an effective continuum of care from primary care to specialist youth mental health services.

Status Of This Submission

19. This submission is made on behalf of ORYGEN Research Centre and has been authorised by ORYGEN's Executive Director, Professor Patrick McGorry. ORYGEN plans to make a subsequent, more detailed, submission to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health prior to the May 13th deadline.

Further Contact

20. For further details about any aspect of this submission or to arrange a site visit, please contact: Matthew Hamilton, Advocate / Policy Analyst, ORYGEN Research Centre, Locked Bag 10, Parkville, Victoria 3052. Phone – 03-83468230, e-mail; mham@unimelb.edu.au

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