

CHILDREN OF PARENTS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS: SYSTEMS CHANGE IN AUSTRALIA REPORT

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November 2008

This report was commissioned by the Australian Infant Child Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA) regarding Children of Parents with a Mental Illness. The report is based on consultations with a wide range of organisations and individuals in the Australian states and territories and nationally between June and September 2008. Grateful thanks are expressed to all contributors for sharing their time, experiences and ideas. Inputs from the National Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) Reference Group are also acknowledged. The views expressed in the report are those of the author and not necessarily of AICAFMHA or any other individual or organisation.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1993 Australian report, *Human Rights and Mental Illness: Report of the National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness* (Burdekin, Guilfoyle & Hall, 1993) highlighted the impact of mental illness on Australian families and children.

Historically, various services for children of parents with a mental illness or 'copmi' were provided by government and non-government and consumer/carer organisations and groups in the Australian states and territories. From the 1990s, data about the extent of mental illness and impact on adults and dependent children was increasingly gathered within services (Maybery, Rupert & Goodyear, 2006; Jenkins, 2004; Farrell et al., 1999) With concern growing about the numbers of dependent 'copmi', early intervention, prevention and promotion policies and programs were established, usually with non-recurrent funding.

On a national level, the Australian Infant Child Adolescent Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA) was established in 2000, with a commitment to representation and sharing; principles and data regarding best practice; advocacy; and collaboration with other relevant bodies in Australia and overseas (Fudge & Robinson, 2008). Australian government funding for national COPMI was provided in 2002, with the overall aim of promoting 'better mental health outcomes for children (0 - 18 years) of parents with a mental health problem or disorder' (COPMI). Several phases of funding have occurred since that time. Current funding supports the development of a flexible training package and focus on evaluation, including in regard to the efficacy of approaches for supporting 'copmi'.

Current Study

This current commissioned research study undertakes a critical analysis of 'copmi' systems change within government, non-government and consumer/carer organisations. The study involves research in various Australian states and territory jurisdictions and nationally, with the report providing details of the historical developments within various locations and also supplying comparative analysis information about different approaches utilised.

Literature searches, semi-structured interviews and focus group consultations with a wide range of stakeholders have been used, with questions asked relevant to enablers, barriers and future directions. Following taping and note taking, transcription and collating of information from focus groups, key themes in relation to enablers and barriers and systems change and sustainability and future directions were analysed.

Systems change models based on organisations using strategic and intentional change approaches or more evolutionary approaches occurring day-to-day within organisations or through interaction with others, are key aspects of the study.

Findings

After collating the data, five key themes emerged in the findings in relation to enablers, barriers and future directions. These are:

- Big Picture Context and Leadership
- Policy and Strategy
- People Culture and Management
- Structures, Systems and Processes
- Resources

The study highlights the importance of strategic approaches in building sustainability of 'copmi' services and also of fostering a positive culture which nurtures evolutionary aspects.

The first key theme regarding 'copmi' systems change as identified by various stakeholder groups across the states, territories and nationally was multi-organisational, big picture context and leadership. Specific aspects highlighted in this report regarding **Big Picture Context and Leadership** enablers, as well as barriers for change and future directions, may be summarised as follows:

Big Picture Context & Leadership: Enablers, Barriers & Future Directions

Enablers

- Legal and policy interconnected contexts
- Critical incidents
- High level influential champions and national contexts
- Historical/social issues and timing.

Barriers

- Poor high level government commitment across agencies
- Changing political agenda, crisis not prevention driven
- Changing senior managers & little interest & support
- Insufficient national/state links

Future Directions

- Increased international/ national and jurisdictional consistency
- Systemic interconnected approaches
- Centre for Excellence for research

This study shows that considering the overall context beyond a single organisation and having high level influential champions involved are very important enablers for 'copmi' change. Poor high-level cross-sector and national/state interconnections and changing political agenda or constantly-changing or disinterested managers are barriers. However, many respondents noted that there are signs of more systemic and interconnected approaches. Greater international/national/state and territory consistency related to recovery models and family-sensitive practices are present indicators for future directions.

Policy and strategy was another broad area which received widespread comments from various focus group participants and relevant enablers, barriers and future directions sub-themes are shown as follows:

Policy & Strategy: Enablers, Barriers & Future Directions

Enablers

- Having high level cross-agency governance and policy or formal signatory documentation such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)
- Developing strategic implementation plans at the state and territory level
- National and jurisdictional and regionally aligned policies
- Ensuring there is a clearly articulated mission/vision.

Barriers

- Few cross sector policies & protocols MOU
- Policy but no implementation plan & resources
- State-regional links needing some local flexibility

Future Directions

- Cross agency protocols agreements
- Early intervention, prevention, promotion policy re-badging

In terms of Policy and Strategy enablers, the importance of establishing statewide high-level cross-sector committees and jointly developed protocols or Memoranda of Agreement to support 'copmi' change is emphasised. Additionally, organisational leaders at all levels within government, non-government and consumer/carer bodies who influence the development of or are responsible for formulating a clear mission and vision aligned to centralised and regional directions, are key aspects. This is supported by the development of implementation plans with detailed strategies and clear outcomes, and with key performance indicators, funding and timelines. Similarly, policy

without organisational implementation plans or cross-sector protocols or those which were considered overly-centralised and which did not allow for local flexibility to meet specific needs were cited as barriers.

In terms of the future in regard to Policy and Strategy, many jurisdictions are beginning to establish or to re-establish high level cross-sector committees in relation to 'copmi', with clear leadership directions and terms of reference and various subcommittees

People, Culture and Management is another broad category which captures responses in relation to enablers, barriers and future directions, with sub-themes for each category indicated as follows:

People, Culture & Management: Enablers, Barriers & Future Directions

Enablers

- Champions at all levels including consumers; building formal/informal alliances
- Bottom-up and top-down influencing
- Formal & informal alliances
- Leadership commitment and reculturing
- Professional learning including joint conferences, mentors and team meetings.

Barriers

- Government agency 'solos; & lack of sharing
- Lack of training in parenting assessment/recovery model
- Frequent personnel changes & intermittent services
- Over-reliance on NGOs/advocates for continuity

Future Directions

- Cross-agency partnerships and networks
- Increased family-sensitive cross-sector and GP training
- Jurisdictional and area staff networks and formalised reporting
- Training of undergraduate/postgraduate health-related workforce groups

Champions at all levels building the successful establishment of 'copmi' organisations represents a key message regarding enablers which was consistently reinforced by all stakeholder groups and across various organisations and jurisdictions. This report also highlights leaders who know how to enthuse workers and influence high level people and have the capacity to build formal and informal alliances as key drivers. This may involve senior level leaders in committees who are able to use their roles and skills to reculture and support others and to bring conflicting points of view together. Conferences and training sessions are an important part of the people capacity focus and as an enabler for 'copmi' and the involvement of consumers was noted as vitally important in many jurisdictions and across various stakeholder groups. Beyond more formalised courses as change enablers are ongoing professional learning processes for people capacity-building. Some respondents commented that this is using team meetings and other day-to-day opportunities to build the skills and knowledge of each worker.

Lack of sharing within government services and across agencies, frequent personnel changes and over-reliance of non-government and consumer/carers during resource shortages and lack of training for workers in terms of the recovery model and parenting assessment were noted as barriers.

However for the future, many respondents highlighted that they were seeing the beginnings of cross-agency partnerships and networks and greater linkages between central and area staff within jurisdictions and cross-sector training. Some involvement of general practitioners in programs and training for relevant students within their undergraduate and postgraduate courses were noted as processes in the early stages of occurrence.

Another key broad area in 'copmi' change is the establishment of relevant **Structures, Systems and Processes** focused on achieving the outcomes and key performance indicators, with enablers, barriers and future directions summarised below:

Structures, Systems & Processes: Enablers, Barriers & Future Directions

Enablers

- National/state/area/team network alignment and local flexibility
- Protocols within and across agencies and systematic data
- Documented minutes and dissemination
- Clear role statement and responsibilities
- Evaluation processes.

Barriers

- Few structures/policies for continuity in agency
- Disconnect of Mental health with GP services
- MH intake data not mandated & poor follow-up
- Confidentiality rules & concerns re data sharing

Future Directions

- Shared positions and joined up services
- Mandated intake data
- Sophisticated evaluation tools use

Regarding enablers, this report indicates that many focus group participants highlighted alignment including state/territory policies and implementation plans and establishing structures such as statewide cross-sector advisory committees, with support provided by a funded statewide coordinator. Some states have also provided funds for area-based 'copmi' staff and increasingly there are considerations about dual roles involving combinations such as 'copmi' and drug and alcohol or 'copmi' and parenting. Area leaders have generally established their own area based cross-sector committees which are focused on the state planning directions but also on local area initiatives, with some funding resources available for these activities. Clear role statements, protocols for working across services in relation to adult mental health intake data and identifying dependent children and their needs and processes for documenting and disseminating minutes, were specific enablers noted. Evaluation and data collection were recognised by some respondents as key enablers.

However, the disconnection between mental health services and general practitioners was also recognised as a barrier, as well as lack of structures, policies and mandated mental health intake data collection. Confidentiality rules preventing data sharing across agencies was another barrier noted by various stakeholders in their responses.

In terms of future directions and structures, systems and processes, a range of services such as child protection, education, drug and alcohol, perinatal, nursing, police, disabilities, housing, general practitioners are increasingly identified by various stakeholders across jurisdictions as being involved in 'copmi'. There is some ongoing coordination and interconnected resourcing being provided.

Resources is the final category emerging from the interview and focus group consultations in terms of enablers, barriers and future directions, with the study report indicating the following aspects:

Resources: Enablers, Barriers & Future Directions

Enablers

- State, area level and specialist services coordinator positions
- Recurrent funding and longevity of key personnel
- Funding for activities/materials.

Barriers

- Child Mental Health funding focus
- No funding for expenses
- No funding for evaluation
- Short term position funds

Future Directions

- Ongoing state coordinator/some regional staff position
- Cross-agency interconnected resourcing

This report indicates the importance of funded positions for coordinators of 'copmi' work at the state, area-based levels and within specialist services as key enablers. State level coordinators are particularly important and some jurisdictions have now achieved this although not always as a recurrent position. Where a statewide position has not been forthcoming, there have been appointments made in some jurisdictions for area level persons or for specialist services.

Concerning barriers, most states in the past decade and currently have been providing some

funding for 'copmi' state, area-based or training roles and project activities but essentially on a non-recurrent basis and some projects had little financial support for activities expenses or for evaluation.

In terms of future directions and resourcing, several jurisdictions have now secured some recurrent funding particularly for a centralised coordinator. In addition, area-based funding is increasingly provided on the basis of increased linking and formalised reporting between area and centralised 'copmi' personnel.

In this report, these themes and the associated sub-themes are linked to systems change literature concerning strategic change approaches and evolutionary approaches which are all relevant within the context of sustainability. A key message is that evolutionary and ongoing processes for change which occur through individual efforts at all levels, team and as individual organisations on a daily basis and within interactions with other organisations and groups, are an important part of change happening over time.

These evolutionary approaches can be highly influential as individual people and teams experiment on a daily basis within their work, sharing new ideas with others and influencing networks and organisations, including those in leadership roles. Over time within the big picture context and with organisational leaders shaping particular directions, new ideas can be built into strategic change management approaches for organisations. Policies and frameworks are developed and strategic planning and processes are devised, with funding and resources for key positions provided and accountability occurring, also including the training and motivating of people to carry out new directions.

In addition to describing these future directions as highlighted by those consulted, arising from the study, the report produces one view of a 'copmi' change management and sustainability matrix. The matrix highlights the Big Picture Context and Policies, Strategies, Resources, and People aspects. Various phases of organisational change and sustainability are outlined in terms of Immature, Early Maturity, Defined, Managed and Integrated/Sustainable. The matrix is particularly relevant because it provides a mechanism for individual states and territories and organisations to identify their own progress across the various change management elements and to identify pathways forward towards ensuring 'copmi' services are sustainable in the future.

A key recommendation arising from the study is that: **The national COPMI initiative provides opportunities through collaborative workshops for documentation of 'copmi' systems change case studies reflecting differing phases within a sustainability matrix to provide support towards more ongoing and sustainable interconnections for the future within a national context.**