

5. POLICY AND STRATEGY

Policy and Strategy was another key theme identified in terms of supporting 'copmi' change and building sustainability. Sub-themes include:

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

Enablers and barriers are outlined, with barriers summarized in Figure 5 as few cross-sector policies; lack of implementation plans and resourcing attached to policies and state-area links needing some flexibility.

5.1 High level cross-sector agreements

Focus group participants from a range of government, non-government and consumer/carer perspectives within jurisdictions identified the establishment of a statewide high level cross-sector committee and jointly developing policies or Memorandum of Agreement as key enablers in supporting 'copmi' change. Similarly lack of cross-sector agreements was identified as a barrier in some states and territories.

In one state the high level cross-sector committee was established and it developed a framework for working together in relation to 'copmi', and this is indicated as follows:

...the framework and systematic analysis is critical....it appreciates the issues...we work together in collaboration. It's whole of government...all services, support and assist and skill up workers to appreciate that whoever walks in their door...and whatever the issues are.... that they're coming to the service.. (and it) will have implications for children, for their immediate relationships... and we need to be mindful of that.

This included developing protocols such as in relation to mental health intake questions regarding dependent children and follow-up services. This is highlighted in the following statement by an area based coordinator in one state:

It needs to be really such a top down directive and it needs to be on forms that register because what we're finding is if it isn't on people's minds, if it is not in front of them we've lost them. Unless it's an interest people aren't going to want to know...most of the time even though you're supposed to ask that family stuffif it's an adult client...is there something more for the children in this family apart from just that they've got a safe place for the night because mum or dad are an inpatient? It's putting it in people's minds that there are children, that they need to work holistically as opposed to just seeing the individual...

For some states, working across government departments and organisations was a significant shift in operational approach and it had raised the profile of 'copmi' amongst high level executives significantly as noted by a government mental health leader in this statement: 'A few years ago we'd never been able to roll out a strategy that impacted on other services... a few years ago if you went to cross-sector meetings very few bureaucrats would know about it ('copmi') ...it really has been quite a change'.

5.2 Strategic implementation plans

Policies, frameworks and cross-sector agreements are increasingly being supported by implementation plans with detailed strategies and clear outcomes, key performance indicators, funding and timelines to ensure that action and change can be effectively supported, with policy without organizational implementation plans being cited as a barrier. In several states the policy framework focuses on the importance of delivery of effective mental health services involving collaborative approaches and having policies, committees and structures that:

..build systems that allow you to collaborate...between difference services....identify systems issues and have the responsibility and the power to actually put processes in place... that needs to come from the top down to give you the authority ... and then be supported...(government service leader).

Implementation plans in one jurisdiction for its lead agency include resourcing which provides for a full-time central position to coordinate the work of the cross-sector committee and follow through on policy areas and implementation, also developing other networks at the area level. These area positions have funding for some key personnel for conducting workshops and building other collaborative approaches at the local level. As noted by one interviewee involved in network leadership:

...so that there is a central position ... with .the role of promoting the mental health in these families involving collaboration...and getting people over time on the same page about these families...parenting, the effect on children...involving interagency collaboration...(and area positions) a conduit between all the various agencies in the area...Given that there's only one of them on their patch, joined up by workshops, and consultation is a key role of those positions...not doing work themselves....skilling up workers on the ground in family support...

Some people currently in funded coordinator roles and operating as a leader in the past but without implementation plans commented on this as a barrier as reflected in the following: *'I was a bit like a lone ranger...I didn't have any mandate...no evidence but ...I knew in my heart it was making a difference and helping people but I went about it the wrong way... although people say if you hadn't done that... you have to start somewhere....it was a practical thing but it didn't have any legs'*.

Jurisdictional strategic plans providing a framework for area-based plans and networks, but with opportunity for local decision-making to meet the particular needs of that region and with some funding for locally-based projects was emphasized as important, with the lack of flexibility seen as a barrier: *'It's problematic if it becomes too structured. It doesn't meet the needs of the local area'* (area-based coordinator).

Other barriers commented on were related to an over-reliance on the non-government sector, with the strategic government framework and resources being essential for long-term sustainability, although with non-government organisations sometimes providing some level of services and visibility between government funding availability:

We've been reforming and enculturating our mental health workers with a family inclusive approach but now we're picking it up for the whole (X) community services ...through collaborating with others and having key bureaucrats ..we've managed to keep it on the state agenda.. The way the state is progressing it it's still not comprehensive enough to the plan that we all drew up...because clearly this work has to be across all government departments....There's a level of disappointment that it hasn't been picked upbut still a spirit of optimism (non-government organisation leader).

The efficiencies and long term sustainability of using a more strategic approach has been noted by

some experienced 'copmi' staff, as highlighted in the following statement by a jurisdictional coordinator: *'You have to be very strategic...this is what I'm doing now ..what's going to make sure it's ('copmi') still there in five years time.. And that's a question I try and ask myself every day now '*

5.3 National, jurisdictional and regional alignment

The alignment of state and national policies and frameworks was another sub-theme receiving comment in terms of policy and strategy. Given the nature of federalism and state-based responsibility for many issues, many research participants recognized the issues for gaining alignment and joint action in terms of national and state policies. It was however recognized that national policies play a significant role in establishing a framework for state-based frameworks and implementation plans. Regular meetings between national body leaders related to 'copmi' and relevant state and territory government leaders are essential in updating knowledge about jurisdictional directions and national 'copmi' pathways.

Membership of national committees also provides opportunities for jurisdictional 'copmi' leaders to gather information regarding Australia-wide directions and to disseminate this and influence their jurisdictional senior executives with responsibility for this area. This is shown in the following jurisdictional leader response which indicates:

....the national COPMI project had established itself and they had invited me to be on the group and it gave me some power...and I could say this is what's happening nationallythis is the national standard for the workforce and I could see what was happening at a national level.

The lack of national and state alignment within and across services was noted as a significant barrier for some non-government organisations and within some jurisdictional contexts, as indicated by this non-government organisation leader:

It was very eye opening just how dysfunctional bureaucracies were...the Australian Commonwealth through its government instrument...have a long way to go in terms of integration...Some of them (jurisdictional officers) couldn't even communicate with their regional offices....We don't have a clear common enough way forward for children yet across government ...One of the things we confirmed quite strongly in the end...we knew it was important to expend some energy sort of empowering groups in the community sector because we knew they would keep it on the agenda.

5.4 Clear vision and mission

Clear mission and vision and some practical skills for marketing ideas and bringing others on board was another sub-theme identified in relation to policy and strategy, as commented by an area-based jurisdictional leader:

And also it's about that whole of government approach that you actually need child protection and all those people at the table developing these pathways and their support because..if you've got a mother who is going into hospital for one night and is a good carer for the other 365 days..It's about partnerships. They need the partnerships to help parents to be the best possible parents in the 70-80-90 % when they are well and then for the 10-20% of the year that they're not, what services can support the relationship and the family unit.

Cross sector committees and policies without commitment and clear vision and resourcing for long term

change was highlighted as a significant barrier and had significant implications in some jurisdictions, with discontinuity causing loss of trust and services:

For long term change it always has to fall back onto the commitment and vision of people above us....The clinical directors they have to have the long term support and commitment...It's not for the want of passion....It's heartbreaking in a way to see these people (consumers/carers in committees) sitting there and thinking well, where do we go...And it's taken a long time to build up those good relationships..(jurisdictional leader).

Part of the issue of strategic approaches and mission and vision also involves marketing a relatively long-standing philosophy such as children of parents with a mental illness and the early intervention, promotion and prevention, and providing a fresh approach and a new context. Several very experienced 'copmi' government-background interviewees acknowledged this issue, as shown in this response from a government leader within one jurisdiction:

We were strategic about the families. We believed in that...we called it slightly different names, we rebadged it to sound like something new.