Mental Health Service System Changes: Experiences of COVID-19 Project

Queensland Alliance FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The aim of this project was to map the changes that have occurred across the mental health service system within the Brisbane South region and to understand people's experiences of these through both the initial and longer term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Major service change

Traditional modes of service delivery and face-to-face services replaced with telehealth and virtual support. This required:

- rapid response
- innovation
- adaptability.

Effective service changes

The effective use of technology was key to implementing the changes.

The use of technology to deliver services:

- Introduced choice and flexibility to service delivery
- Improved access to services
- Helped to reduce isolation.

Unsuitable service changes

The online environment didn't work for everyone:

- Not always appropriate for some types of therapy
- Concerns around privacy
- Building trust and rapport sometimes difficult to establish online
- Preference for face-to-face.

Enablers to care

- Access to technology, training and financial assistance
- Better communication
- Flexibility in funding models
- Whole-of-system and organisational response.

Barriers to care

Limited access to technology, due to lack of access to devices and/or the internet and poor IT skills, was a major barrier to care. This restricted access to:

- Mental health services
- Information.

Other barriers included:

- Fewer appointments
- COVID-19 restrictions
- Poor communication and misinformation.

What should happen next?

- Integrate telehealth into the mental health service system with consideration of the following:
  — the flexible integration of telehealth into funding contracts and performance reporting.
  — ensure best-practice standards (including privacy and confidentiality), guides and training programs to support service providers.
- Reduce existing barriers to using telehealth and other online services, including access to devices and data.
- Develop telehealth guides to support uptake from people accessing mental health services.
- Support ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of telehealth across the mental health service system.

Further information

The Final Report will be available on our website in July.

www.qamh.org.au

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