

Australasian College
for Emergency Medicine

Mental Health Strategy and Plan

1. Foreword

Across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, demand for mental health services is increasing year-on-year, yet there are too few services to meet community need. In the absence of these services, emergency departments (EDs) are the only access point for many people to the mental health system.

Our members working in EDs report, and our data confirms, that patients presenting to EDs for mental health care routinely experience excessive and unreasonably long waits often in inappropriate and, at times, unsafe environments. It is a constant challenge for ED staff to find a safe path for patients such as admission to an inpatient bed or home with appropriate community supports in place, particularly when someone is experiencing a crisis. The current mental health system planning, coordination and accountability mechanisms are failing. These dangerous delays and negative experiences are an indicator of widespread system failure across acute psychiatric and community-based mental health care, damaging to people who need care, and stressful for staff working in EDs.

In October 2018, the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM; the College) convened the national Mental Health in the Emergency Care Summit (the Summit). The Summit brought together over 170 experts in recognition of the vital role that EDs play as part of the mental health system. The Summit was the catalyst for a range of mental health-related activities across the entire College in the past three years. The Summit delivered the [Mental Health in the Emergency Department Consensus Statement](#) calling for new models of care across the mental health system, including for the management of urgent care needs and for discharge and referral. The statement has garnered over 1000 signatures, represented by physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, carers, and consumer advocates, including CEOs for peak bodies for consumers, emergency and mental health nurses, and community health services across Australia.

Following the Summit, the College has published several reports, including the [Waiting times in the Emergency Department for People with Acute Mental and Behavioural Conditions](#) and [The Long Wait: An Analysis of Mental Health Presentations to Australian Emergency Departments](#). These two publications have analysed and reported on national research data regarding mental health presentations to Australian EDs.

A third report, titled [Nowhere Else To Go: Why Australia's Health System Results in People with Mental Illness Getting 'Stuck' in Emergency Departments](#) was published in 2020. The report analyses why Australia's health system is failing to meet the urgent needs of people presenting to EDs for mental health care, and presented a comprehensive set of recommendations for reform. The report closely examines how funding and governance factors impact on demand for ED services by people experiencing mental health crises, emphasising the ever-increasing complexity in people's lives, and the need to build and sustain a functioning, integrated mental health system across the whole spectrum of care.

In June 2019, the College convened a [summit in Wellington](#), Aotearoa New Zealand, which brought together over 80 delegates, representing doctors, nurses, patient advocates and system managers. The Summit delegates considered progress made by the government in response to its Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, especially the Wellbeing Budget, which comprises a suite of wellbeing measures intended to raise living conditions across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Delegates at the Summit noted the research data demonstrating the poor experiences of mental health patients and discussed the needs of patients when they were in crisis. The delegates shared experiences of good models of care, innovations in service delivery and discussed the need for investment in resources, people, culture and support, both inside and outside of the ED.

Since these two summits, the ACEM Board has committed to the development of a mental health strategy and action plan, and establishment of a Mental Health Working Group to support it. The Strategy builds on the considerable mental health advocacy ACEM has undertaken in the last four years.

Supporting the mental health of Australians and New Zealanders requires a whole of system approach and this Strategy demonstrates the commitment of ACEM and its members to contribute to that reform.

ACEM President Clare Skinner



2. Strategic context

The prevalence of persons experiencing mental illness in Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand is significant. It is estimated that one in five (20 per cent) people in both countries have experienced mental ill health in the past 12 months. Research data from both countries highlights that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia, and the Māori population in Aotearoa New Zealand, are overrepresented in mental health statistics.

In Australia, the mental health sector finds itself in a period of major reform at the national and jurisdictional levels. This reform reflects the release of the Productivity Commission *Mental Health Inquiry Report* in November 2020, the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan nearing the end of its five-year span, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, the ongoing Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and the Commonwealth's [plans to overhaul the NDIS Act](#) and [implementation of the policy](#), which funds mental health supports and services for 65,000 Australians.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, improving mental health has been high on the agenda of the current government since its election in 2017. A 2018 report, *He Ara Oranga*, from the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction identified many priorities, including the establishment of the independent Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and the reform of mental health legislation, resulting in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Act 2020. These two acts set the stage for significant service level reform, which will need strong guidance from consumers and health practitioners.

ACEM has committed itself to advocating in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand for adequate mental health service provision, improved funding and service models, adequacy of rural mental health services, improved workforce capacity, effective services coordination and accountability, and ensuring best practice emergency mental health care and treatment.

ACEM is also committed to ensuring the needs of first nations people, Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, are prioritised in this important work. As set out in Manaaki Mana and our Reconciliation Action Plan, we will seek practical, culturally safe ways for mental health equity to be delivered in our emergency departments and the community.

3. Our business

ACEM is responsible for training emergency physicians and the advancement of professional standards in emergency medicine in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. The goals and actions in this strategy reflect where we can direct our influence through:

- Enabling our members and ACEM staff to better understand mental health and wellbeing through education, training and communication;
- Promoting standards of care through our policies, guidelines and standards;
- Establishing initiatives within our Specialist Training and Continuous Professional Development programmes to ensure our emergency specialist workforce is well equipped to respond to patients experiencing mental distress (including through Accreditation Standards, curriculum and training requirements and ongoing professional development);
- Advocacy to governments to build a holistic, integrated and fit-for-purpose mental health system.

4. Our vision

Advocating for a mental health system where all people have access to the care they need, at the time they need it. A mix of demand management (care in the community) and resourcing EDs to provide acute and urgent care. And no patient spends longer than 12 hours in the emergency department. Ever.

5. Our goals

- Ensure appropriate mental health content for the FACEM Training Program, Emergency Medicine Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma Training Programs
- Provide a comprehensive offering of mental health education resources through the ACEM CPD program
- Ensure ACEM's policies and standards champion high quality, appropriate care for patients presenting with a mental health crisis
- Ensure a broad range of members are engaged with our strategy and are utilising best practice when providing care for patients presenting with a mental health crisis
- Effectively influence all the jurisdictions in which we operate to better meet the needs of people experiencing a mental health crisis
- Ensure our own research and our research partnerships inform the activities in our mental health action plan
- Ensure an acknowledgement of the social determinants of health informs College mental health advocacy and the activities in our mental health action plan
- Lived experience and co-design

6. About this strategy

This strategy will guide ACEM in its work to improve the standard of mental healthcare in the ED and the community. It sets out key themes and actions, and a timeframe for delivery. As well as guiding the work of ACEM staff and members of the Mental Health Working Group, the below action plan provides transparency and accountability to ACEM members and the Board.

7. Mental Health Action Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia

Theme 1: Education and Training

Our goals for this theme are to:

- Ensure appropriate mental health content for ACEM's Training Programs
- Provide a comprehensive offering of mental health education resources through the ACEM CPD program

Action	Deliverable – Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia	Timeframe	Responsibility
1. Provide a comprehensive offering of mental health education resources through the ACEM CPD program	1.1 Better Mental Health in Rural EDs Project	June 2022	Education
	1.2 Undertake an audit of accredited ACEM CPD mental health resources and report to the Mental Health Working Group	June 2023	Education
	1.3 Implement Mental Health Working Group recommendations arising from Action 1.2 where practical	June 2024	Education
2. Ensure appropriate mental health content for the FACEM Training Program, Emergency Medicine Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma Training Programs	2.1 Undertake an audit of mental health content in ACEM's training programs, including assessments, and report to the Mental Health Working Group	June 2023	Education Training
	2.2 Implement Mental Health Working Group recommendations arising from Action 2.1 where practical	June 2024	Education Training

Theme 2: Standards

Our goal for this theme is to ensure ACEM's policies and standards champion high quality, appropriate care for patients presenting with a mental health crisis.

Action	Deliverable – Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia	Timeframe	Responsibility
3. Ensure ACEM's policies and standards champion high quality, appropriate care for patients presenting with a mental health crisis	3.1 ACEM ED Design Guidelines (G15) Update Project	December 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships Standards and Endorsement Committee
	3.2 Develop a Policy on the Medical Assessment of Patients Presenting to the ED with Mental Health Conditions (P784)	June 2022	Policy, Research and Partnerships Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
	3.3 Develop a Statement on the Use of Restrictive Practices in EDs	June 2022	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	3.4 Review Policy on Access to Care for Patients with Mental Health Conditions (P41)	December 2022	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	3.5 Undertake a needs analysis of further standards specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context	June 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	3.6 Undertake a needs analysis of further standards specific to the Australian context	June 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships

Theme 3: Communications and Engagement (internal stakeholders)

Our goal for this theme is to ensure a broad range of members are engaged with our strategy when providing care for patients presenting with a mental health crisis.

Action	Deliverable – Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia	Timeframe	Responsibility
4. Ensure a broad range of members are engaged with our Strategy	4.1 Develop an Internal Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, including with FACEMs, trainees, DEMs and DEMTs	November 2022	Policy, Research and Partnerships Communications and Media Division
	4.2 Establish and support a network of ACEM mental health champions across Aotearoa New Zealand	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	4.3 Establish and support a network of ACEM mental health champions across Australia	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	4.4 Develop a one-page key messages resource for mental health champions to use in their advocacy	June 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships

Theme 4: Advocacy (external stakeholders)

Our goal for this theme is to effectively influence all the jurisdictions in which we operate to better meet the needs of people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Action	Deliverable – Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia	Timeframe	Responsibility
5. Partner with stakeholders to better meet the needs of people experiencing a mental health crisis	5.1 Utilise the ACEM and Mitchell Institute Advocacy Paper, <i>Nowhere Else to Go</i> (2020), and the ACEM Mental Health in the Emergency Department Consensus Statement (2019) in engagement and advocacy with Australian Federal and State jurisdictions in actions to improve the policy and service response for people who present to the ED in a mental health crisis and the outcomes of local roundtables	June 2022	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	5.2 Develop an advocacy strategy for identified solutions to mental health challenges in Aotearoa New Zealand	June 2022	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	5.3 Engage with the Aotearoa New Zealand Ministry of Health in actions to improve the policy and service response for people who present to the ED in a mental health crisis	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	5.4 Monitor progress of Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Government funding and policy implementation in relation to mental health in the ED	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships

Theme 5: Research

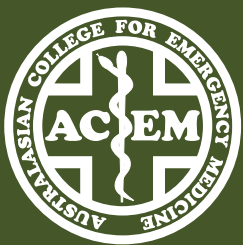
Our goal for this theme is to ensure our own research and our research partnerships inform the activities in our mental health action plans.

Action	Deliverable – Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia	Timeframe	Responsibility
6. Ensure our research informs the activities in our mental health action plan	6.1 ACEM Prevalence of Mental Health Access Block (POMAB) study – Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand	Held annually in November	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	6.2 Analysis of mental health presentations during COVID-19 pandemic	November 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	6.3 Create standard mental health presentation definitions to assist in building a bi-national data set and aid our advocacy across jurisdictions	June 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships Emergency Department Epidemiology Network
	6.4 Undertake detailed analysis of mental health challenges and priorities in Aotearoa New Zealand, including the identification of solutions to inform the development of an advocacy strategy	June 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	6.5 Explore funding for research projects that align with our Strategy goals	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships Mental Health Working Group
	6.6 Research alternate models of care informed by engagement with mental health consumers and carers and co-design principles	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships Mental Health Working Group
7. Ensure our research partnerships inform the activities in our mental health action plan	7.1 Continue to seek out research partnerships in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand	Ongoing	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	7.2 ACEM and University of Sydney: Reducing suicidal thoughts and behaviours in young people presenting for health care project	December 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships
	7.3 ACEM, RMIT, and Mind Australia: Closing the mental healthcare gap: co-designing resources for ED staff	December 2023	Policy, Research and Partnerships

Theme 6: Monitoring

Our goal for this theme is to ensure our Strategy is implemented.

Action	Deliverable – Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia	Timeframe	Responsibility
8. Monitor the implementation of actions in this Strategy	8.1 Provide regular reports on progress and implementation of the Action Plan to the Council of Advocacy, Practice and Partnerships (CAPP), Council of Education (COE), and the ACEM Board	Ongoing for duration of Mental Health Working Group	Policy, Research and Partnerships Mental Health Working Group



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