

Accoras appears as a witness at the Queensland Mental Health Select Committee – helping improve mental health for Queenslanders

On March 18, Accoras was invited to be a witness at the Queensland Mental Health Select Committee as a strong advocate for holistic early intervention and support system reform.

During the round table session Suzie Lewis spoke on behalf of Accoras, taking the opportunity to share our thoughts on systemic, whole of community mental health promotion with the entire committee.

We are delighted we had the opportunity to share our views on how mental health outcomes for Queenslanders can be improved.

Read our full opening statement on the next page.



Pictured: Rebecca Culverhouse (Accoras CEO), Suzie Lewis (Accoras General Manager – Strategy, Innovation and Research) with Joe Kelly MP (Committee Chair)

March 18, 2022

Statement delivered by Suzie Lewis on behalf of Accoras – 18 March 2022

Thank you for this opportunity.

I would like to acknowledge the people of the Yugambah language region, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

I am here on behalf of Accoras, an early intervention mental health organisation that operates in South-East Queensland. We believe in good mental health for all, and that early intervention when problems first emerge prevents both immediate suffering, and long-term social, economic and personal costs. Our experience has taught us that a holistic approach to mental health care is essential – accounting for all areas of a person's life, and their family and community.

Effective mental health interventions start with what we know good mental health requires. In short, good mental health requires that someone is living a good life.

So what does that mean?

- *Good mental health requires feeling safe – this includes secure housing, a stable income to provide for yourself and your family, and being free from harassment or threats due to your race, religion or sexuality.*
- *Safety includes freedom from childhood trauma – abuse, neglect, domestic and family violence, and the impacts of caregiver substance use.*
- *It requires meaningful and supportive relationships with the people that matter to you – relationships where you feel looked after, that you matter, and are loved.*
- *It requires a connection to your culture and where your people have come from – particularly for First Nations people and their connection to Country.*
- *It requires the ability to look after your physical health – this includes sleep, exercise, nutritious foods and equitable access to healthcare.*
- *It requires a meaningful way to spend your days – for most people that is school, work or caring for children or others. For others it can be volunteering, advocacy or otherwise contributing to their community. An occupation gives you a routine, a sense of purpose and achievement, and frequently an income. All matter for mental health.*
- *Finally, good mental health requires feeling confident about yourself, your world and your future, and that you have the ability to bring about good things in life.*

If someone lacks the resources to live a reasonably good life, mental health services will struggle to make an impact.

A therapeutic relationship of an hour a week or a fortnight, where a person is supported to change their thinking, behaviour and emotional responses, is important.

Medication is important.

However, where a person lacks safety, good relationships, or a meaningful occupation, a clinic-centric approach to the treatment of mental illness can fail as it implicitly sets the expectation that, with treatment, the individual can facilitate a significant enough change in their circumstances to recover.

But the world we live in is more complex than that. And particularly so for children and young people, where brains are still developing and so much of their life is in the control of others. Where children do not feel safe and supported, they lack the executive functioning to engage with and benefit from talk therapy.



Which is why we say effective mental health care demands a holistic focus – involving parents and carers, with focused support to succeed in education or employment, help to secure stable housing, that responds to cultural and spiritual needs, care that is integrated and coordinated with other healthcare and social supports.

Where mental health care does not undertake a holistic assessment, and develop a treatment approach that incorporates all goals and important life domains of the client, it can and does fail.

You do not need to take my word for it – consumers have been saying this for a long time, and that is one of the reason lived experience in governance and workforces is so critical.

There are already services funded to support people in these life domains. There is a need for increased mental health funding in Queensland. However, we also need to attend to maximising the effectiveness of the funding we have. Collaborative approaches, and integrated support systems, where Government departments, NGOs and private providers provide an integrated response to the people who need it most.

Key drivers of community mental health in the control of government are education, housing, healthcare, child protection, disability services, transport, development and infrastructure planning, community services, and early childhood education and care. The way they are delivered, their policy

priorities and their funding levels impact all members of the community. All need to be accessible, equitable, effective and coordinated to maximise community welling.

I will close by saying that, if we want the greatest economic impact for our mental health dollars, we need to invest both early in life and early in illness. Supporting families gives children the best start in life, the best opportunity to develop healthy brain architecture through supportive relationships, good nutrition and the ability to safely explore their world, develop and grow. This is especially important for vulnerable or marginalised children and families. Mental health and social programs that target parents and help them understand and support optimal child development reap rewards throughout the lifespan.

Thank you.

