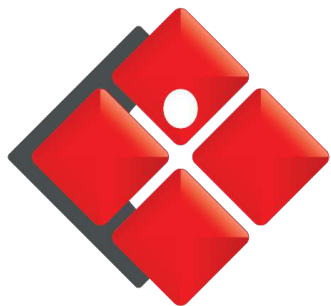


Submission to
Health and Wellbeing Queensland

***Draft Mental Health and
Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2029***

13 May 2024



PeakCare
Queensland Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

PeakCare welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2029 (the Strategy). As Queensland’s peak body for child and family services, PeakCare recognises the potential of this strategy to significantly enhance mental health support and wellbeing across Queensland. This submission aims to identify key areas for improvement and propose actionable recommendations based on evidence and the living experiences of both young people, and the child and family services system.

ABOUT PEAKCARE

PeakCare is a not-for-profit peak body for child and family services in Queensland, providing an independent voice representing and promoting matters of interest to the non-government sector.

Across Queensland, PeakCare has more than 80 member organisations which include small, medium and large, local, state-wide and national non-government organisations which provide prevention and early intervention, generic, targeted, and intensive family support to children, young people, adults and families. Member organisations also provide child protection services, foster care, kinship care and residential care services for children and young people and their families who are at risk of entry to, or who are in the statutory child protection system.

A network of associate members and supporters also subscribe to PeakCare. This includes individuals with an interest in child protection, youth justice and related services, and who are supportive of PeakCare’s policy platform around the rights and entitlements of children, young people and their families to safety, wellbeing and equitable access to life opportunities.

PEAKCARE’S SUBMISSION

PeakCare commends the intention of the Strategy and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the early draft of the Strategy. In providing our feedback we aim to assist in refining the Strategy to ensure it effectively aligns with and addresses the diverse mental health and wellbeing needs of Queenslanders, particularly young people.

Important note: The feedback provided by PeakCare reflects the voice of young people who have actively contributed to the review process and PeakCare thanks all young people who have shared their voice and contributed their expertise.

Alignment with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

There is strong support for the principles and objectives described in the strategy. Prioritising holistic, preventative approaches to mental health while also emphasising the importance of inclusivity and community empowerment was identified as a particular strength by young people consulted. PeakCare acknowledges the importance of providing comprehensive mental health care that focuses on prevention and early intervention and believes all Queenslanders, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups, should have access to mental health resources.

The Strategy’s commitment to empowering communities and individuals to support their own mental health aligns with the child and family sectors efforts in strengthening community and family support services. The vision of the Strategy, which aims for all

Queenslanders to thrive through enhanced mental health and wellbeing, resonates deeply with PeakCare's promotion of safety, wellbeing, and equitable access to opportunities for children, young people and families.

Assessment of Strategy Focus Area One – Collective Wellbeing

Reflecting the voices shared through our consultation activities, PeakCare strongly supports Focus Area One – 'Collective Wellbeing' and acknowledges the comprehensive and holistic approach. This focus area emphasises the social, cultural, and economic conditions that impact all Queenslanders' ability to thrive and highlights the need of cross collaboration across all sectors, recognising sustainable mental health solutions must surpass traditional healthcare models and offer a cohesive and integrated service model.

We acknowledge the Strategy's call for a whole-of-government approach and the emphasis that is placed on the importance of promotion and prevention at a societal level. We recommend the development of detailed plans for effectively engaging diverse stakeholders, including local communities, indigenous groups, young people, and culturally and linguistically diverse populations to ensure culturally sensitive approaches.

The focus on Collective Wellbeing lays a solid foundation for systemic improvements in mental health across Queensland. By integrating detailed action plan and effective engagement strategies, the Strategy will not only address current gaps but also position Queensland to adapt to and overcome future challenges in mental health and wellbeing support.

Assessment of Strategy Focus Area Two – Community Wellbeing

Reflecting the voices shared through our consultation activities, PeakCare strongly supports Focus Area Two – 'Community Wellbeing' and acknowledges the critical role played by cohesive communities in enhancing individual mental health and overall societal wellbeing. This approach empowers communities to lead their own solutions while also encouraging initiatives that are tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of each community. With a focus on enhancing existing strengths rather than only addressing deficits, the Strategy promotes a positive framework that is more likely to inspire greater participation and commitment from community members.

The Strategy's commitment to including diverse groups, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensures that interventions are culturally safe and equitable, and that the cultural knowledge and practices are respectfully implemented. We agree that an inclusive approach enhances the effectiveness of interventions and ensures that everyone can benefit from these initiatives.

PeakCare notes that providing greater detailed guidance on how communities can initiate, manage, and sustain mental health initiatives may be beneficial as it would provide greater clarity and help to ensure consistent implementation across diverse settings. This includes greater focus on how the strategy can promote place-based and participatory community development initiatives to improve mental health and wellbeing which are led by communities, for communities.

PeakCare believes creating mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating community-led initiatives is essential. Setting clear benchmarks for success and creating ongoing feedback mechanisms would allow for the continuous adaptation and improvement of initiatives based on real-world outcomes and community input. Ensuring these community initiatives

are well integrated with broader health and social services would create a seamless support network for individuals, enhancing the overall efficacy of the strategy.

PeakCare is supportive of the inclusion of Community Wellbeing as a focus area in the strategy and is a crucial focus point in effectively improving mental health outcomes across Queensland.

Assessment of Strategy Focus Area Three – Individual Wellbeing

Reflecting the voices shared through our consultation activities, PeakCare supports Focus Area Three – ‘Individual Wellbeing’ noting the importance of empowering individuals to take active roles in managing their own mental health and supporting others. This approach is fundamental, acknowledging that personal agency and self-determination are critical to the overarching approach of mental health care and prevention. The Strategy emphasises the importance of enhancing mental health understanding and literacy to ensure individuals can recognise signs of mental ill-health, seek appropriate help, and adopt preventive measures to protect and maintain mental health. This empowerment is not only crucial for personal wellbeing but also helps to alleviate pressures on the broader mental health system.

A key area of feedback from young people is a recommendation that the Strategy focuses more explicitly on strengthening support for individuals in vulnerable situations, such as those with existing mental ill-health, the elderly, or residents in remote communities, who may require more tailored resources and direct interventions. Integrating mental health education and preventive measures into general health care settings would further enhance the effectiveness of this focus area, emphasising the interconnection between mental and physical health. PeakCare also recommends expanding the utilisation of technology could also enhance the reach and effectiveness of the Strategy. Online platforms, apps, and telehealth therapy options can provide vital tools for individuals to manage their mental health, especially when traditional services are less accessible or during times of increased demand.

PeakCare agrees with the Strategy’s focus on Individual Wellbeing for its recognition of the crucial role of personal empowerment in mental health, enhancing the strategy with greater inclusiveness, specific supports for vulnerable groups, integration with physical health services, and a broader use of technology would ensure that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, can benefit from the strategy and contribute to a healthier Queensland.

General feedback on Focus Areas

Across all focus areas, PeakCare believes it is crucial to emphasise the integration of technology and digital health solutions, particularly in extending reach and accessibility of mental health resources such as telehealth, apps, and online support communities that can provide support outside of traditional face-to-face interactions. PeakCare believes the Strategy is comprehensive and well-structured, however through implementing these enhancements there is opportunity to strengthen the effectiveness and ensure it meets the diverse needs of Queensland’s population both now and in the future.

Assessment of the Driving Principles

PeakCare agrees with the Strategy’s Driving Principles, acknowledging the provision of a comprehensive framework which is essential for guiding effective mental health interventions. We support the emphasis on collaboration across government, community

groups, service providers, and individuals with lived experiences, and acknowledge the importance of recognising effective mental health solutions require collaborative efforts. The strategy's commitment to being evidence-informed and evidence generating ensures interventions are not only grounded in solid research but also contribute to ongoing knowledge development, crucial for adapting to emerging mental health challenges. We commend the inclusion of principles promoting inclusivity and equity is to ensure the Strategy addresses the needs of all populations, especially marginalised and vulnerable groups. We support the inclusion of strength based and community-led initiatives to empower local entities and foster sustainable, culturally sensitive solutions that are supported by the communities they serve.

PeakCare supports these principles and acknowledges that they are fundamental in creating a mental health care system which is both adaptive and sustainable.

Additional Feedback

Evaluating the Impact of a Population-Wide Approach

PeakCare agrees with the Strategy's focus on a system-wide view, noting that promotion, prevention, and early intervention is essential for improving the mental health and wellbeing of Queenslanders. PeakCare believes this method aligns well with contemporary health practices, which highlight the importance of proactive rather than reactive measures with an aim that through the prioritisation of early intervention and preventative care, the prevalence and severity of mental-ill health will be significantly reduced.

PeakCare believes that emphasising mental health at a population level helps normalise and destigmatise discussions around mental health, making it easier for individuals to seek help early. It also ensures more equitable health outcomes by implementing accessible strategies across diverse population groups, including vulnerable and marginalised communities. This approach is crucial in a diverse state like Queensland, where health disparities can be pronounced.

It is important to acknowledge the effectiveness of this approach is dependent on several factors, including adequate resource allocation for sustained preventive measures, comprehensive implementation across all regions of Queensland, and robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of these interventions. Effective integration with existing health and social services is also vital to ensure a holistic approach to mental health.

Who do you think we need to hear from in the development of the Strategy and Action Plan?

PeakCare acknowledges that children and young people often face unique and challenging barriers in accessing mental health and wellbeing services. Their insights can provide valuable perspectives on what effective help looks like and how it should be accessed. Underpinning our submission are learnings from and critical insights derived from recent consultations with young people on the development of a place-based mental health and wellbeing strategy for the Sunshine Coast (where young people developed the concept of MyGoTo4 i.e., 'do you have four people or places you can go to for help'). This initiative, characterised by its youth-centered co-design approach with 'adults as allies', has proven invaluable in understanding the specific mental health needs and help-seeking behaviours of young people in the community. PeakCare strongly believes that through direct involvement of young people in the creation and refinement of health strategies that affect

them we can ensure that interventions are not only tailored to the demographic's actual needs but are also embraced by Queensland's children and young people.

The MyGoTo4 consultations highlighted several barriers to help-seeking among young people, with reoccurring conversations around stigma, misconceptions by community and health professionals, and a general lack of awareness about resources that are available to access. Using these insights, PeakCare proposes embedding measures within the Strategy with a strong focus on removing these barriers through educational initiatives, targeted training for health professionals, and public campaigns designed to change the negative perceptions associated with seeking help.

Youth participatory consultation also drew awareness to the diversity in help-seeking preferences among young people, emphasising the importance of flexible and individualised support services and approaches. To address the individual needs of young people, the Strategy should offer a broad range of support options and access points that reflect the varied preferences of young Queenslanders. This could include enhancing digital mental health resources, broadening peer support programs, and ensuring services are culturally safe and universally accessible. Active participation of young people in consultation groups and youth-led co design is significant in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of Strategy is maintained. PeakCare recommends establishing and providing regular feedback opportunities through youth advisory panels or by conducting regular surveys to gauge the effectiveness of current mental health programs, and adjusting strategies based on this feedback.

By integrating these learnings from the MyGoTo4 consultations into the Strategy, we can ensure that the needs and voices of young people are not only heard but are also a driving force in shaping mental health services in Queensland. This approach will contribute significantly to the development of a responsive, inclusive, and effective strategy that supports the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders, particularly our youth.

CONCLUSION

PeakCare supports the foundational principles and strategic focus areas laid out in the draft Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2029. PeakCare emphasises the importance of ensuring the voices of Queensland's children and young people are consulted and their voices are heard as these consultations will provide invaluable perspectives. By addressing the highlighted barriers to help-seeking, expanding support options to cater to diverse needs, and continuously engaging with young people, we can ensure that the strategy not only meets but exceeds its goals of improving mental health outcomes across all demographics in Queensland. We believe that with these enhancements, the strategy will effectively set a new standard for mental health care, fostering a community where every Queenslanders can thrive.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Tom Allsop
Chief Executive Officer
PeakCare Queensland Incorporated