

Foreword

This report is a summary of the projects funded under the Innovative Grants Program. The Program was established in 1992 to support community-based reform activities under the National Mental Health Strategy. The Program was established under the auspice of the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council's (AHMAC) National Mental Health Working Group. After reviewing applications, the Working Group made recommendations to the then Commonwealth Minister of Human Services and Health regarding projects for funding. A broad range of projects were funded covering a variety of issues related to the delivery of community-based services to people with mental illness and their carers.

A report was prepared on each project which describes the project methodology and outcomes, and includes recommendations for future project work. To broadly disseminate the outcomes of the various projects, the Commonwealth Mental Health Branch has worked in conjunction with the project officers to prepare this summary report of the Innovative Grants Program. The project reports, and this summary report, will be distributed throughout the community and made available on both the Internet and in libraries throughout Australia. In addition, contact details are provided for the project officers who may be contacted directly for further information.

Aim of the Program

The Innovative Grants Program was established to develop and evaluate innovative service delivery models with a community focus, to improve the integration of existing community services and to address gaps in service delivery. The projects aimed to develop models of service delivery suitable for implementation in other areas, and to involve a broad range of community stakeholders including people with mental illness and their carers.

The Program focused on the community sector and issues for people with mental illness. The projects addressed issues related to empowering people with a mental illness, improving their social and life skills, and the interaction of community members in programs involving people with mental illness.

The projects involved a variety of stakeholders including community based service providers, people with mental illness, consumer advocates and carers, and other health sector services. Many of the projects also addressed programs coordinated by other government agencies for example income, housing and social security. The projects under the Innovative Grant Program covered the full range of issues relevant to meeting the health and service needs of people with a mental illness in the community.

Process

Under the Program, 38 projects were funded totalling \$5.5 million. The projects were funded in two separate rounds.

Advertisements were placed in national newspapers seeking expressions-of-interest for research projects. Following review of the applications by the AHMAC National Mental Health Working Group, the then Commonwealth Minister of Human Services and Health endorsed funding for seventeen projects in the first round. Twenty-one projects were funded in the second round.

Applications were assessed on the basis of seven criteria:

1. National significance;
2. Methodological soundness;
3. Adequacy of proposed evaluation;
4. Community focus;
5. Dissemination of results;
6. Expected outcomes; and
7. Overall evaluation.

These criteria reflect the objectives of the National Mental Health Strategy and, in particular, the focus on innovative service delivery.

The projects appointed officers to coordinate and manage the research activities including consultation with community stakeholders.

Progressive reports were provided throughout the period of the funding and were reviewed by the Commonwealth Mental Health Branch.

Of the 38 projects funded, 35 were completed. Three projects were discontinued in the early stages due to changes in the scope of the project activities and changes to project staffing. All 35 projects produced a final report which included detailed recommendations about future project work. Some projects produced additional

materials such as a board-game, posters, pamphlets, newsletters, guidelines for service delivery, and training programs and manuals.

One of the projects funded under the Program was the organisation of an award ceremony to publicly acknowledge service quality and excellence in mental health services. The ceremony has been funded in subsequent years and is titled the Mental Health Services Conference Australia and New Zealand. Throughout this report, details are included about the services/individuals who received achievement awards for the years 1995-1998 inclusive.

Diversity of projects covered

The projects included the development, implementation and evaluation of a variety of innovative service models. The projects covered a broad range of topics:

- integrated models of mental health care;
- training for Indigenous advocacy and for Indigenous health care workers;
- supporting families of parents with a mental illness;
- providing accommodation for people with mental illness and people who are homeless;
- dual disability, namely alcohol and drug use;
- empowering people with a mental illness through the Arts, peer counselling, improved knowledge of consumer rights, development of management and treatment protocols, and consumer participation in mental health guardian services;
- accessing mental health services in rural and remote areas;
- community involvement in support programs for people with a mental illness;
- increasing access to mental health services for people from culturally diverse backgrounds and refugees; and
- supporting mentally ill offenders released from prisons and hospitals.

Generally, most projects recruited only a small number of participants which reflects the local, community-based nature of the projects.

The project activities encompassed people across the age range and included people with high support needs and people who were socially disadvantaged. A number of projects focussed on the role of the family and issues for children and adolescents of parents with a mental illness.

Outcomes

As reported above, final reports were prepared for all completed projects. The final reports include a detailed description about the project methodology and present a number of recommendations about extending the project activities and incorporating the outcomes into broader processes.

In summary the main achievements of the projects were:

- empowering consumers to understand and exercise their rights;
- developing broader support networks for carers;
- providing training for consumer advocates and mental health workers;
- redirecting the focus of service delivery to the needs of families;
- heightening awareness of the issues for children and adolescents with mental health needs;
- evaluating innovative service structure models for national application;
- trialing innovative strategies for service delivery;
- exploring options for service outcome measurement;
- facilitating access to services for refugees and people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- assessing service need, usage and outcome from the perspective of the consumer;
- developing flexible treatment programs and advocacy services;
- expanding community networks and cooperation between agencies;
- strengthening the interaction of allied health and mental health workers;
- providing for the special needs of Indigenous people with mental illness;
- establishing local mental health support groups;
- identifying gaps in service delivery;
- supporting the provision of long-term secure and flexible housing;
- improving the symptomatology of participants; and
- in some instances, extending existing services.

Dissemination of reports

A summary has been prepared from each of the final reports in consultation with the project officers. The summaries have been collated into this report and will be distributed to all participating

services and staff, State and Territory Departments, and other interested parties. The summary report will also be available from State libraries and the Commonwealth Mental Health Branch's Internet site:

<http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe>.

Details are provided at the end of each summary for the project officers. These officers can be contacted directly with any query about the project or for copies of the project report.

The Innovative Grant Program was established to run over a two-year period. Many of the projects experienced difficulties in finalising activities within this time frame due to delays in the recruitment of project participants and the complexity of project management. For example some projects experienced delays in developing and implementing project plans and employing project officers. In some instances projects experienced changes to staffing which impacted on the direction of the project activities. There were also delays in the evaluation process and in writing progressive reports. As stated above three projects were discontinued because the project activities did not assist in service reform. Further details about these issues are included in the project summaries.

This report includes a summary of each of the research projects finalised under the Program. The project summaries are presented under the following headings:

- Families;
- Transcultural;
- Rural Areas and Remote Communities;
- Advocacy and Community Support;
- Treatment for Dual Disability;
- Consumer Empowerment;
- Tenants and Accommodation; and
- Support and Training Networks.

Future Directions

As stated above, the project reports are available for dissemination. The reports provide useful information which can be widely distributed and utilised in the community. There are a number of strategies discussed in the project summaries which may be further developed. There is scope to build upon the important lessons of this research program.

Many of the initiatives developed in the Program have informed the directions of the Second National Mental Health Plan. The Second Plan has identified three themes for further reform covering promotion and prevention, partnerships in service change, and quality of service delivery. Many of the outcomes and issues explored by the projects under the Innovative Grants Program provide information relevant to the work under the Second Plan.

The services, their staff and the project officers are congratulated for their work over the last few years on this important initiative.

Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council's
National Mental Health Working Group
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