

‘Our Say’: Meaningfully engaging youth with lived experience in mental health

Authors:

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Background:

The ACT Child & Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance (CYMHSA) Youth Reference Group (YRG) comprises young people with lived experience supporting the Alliance’s work. The YRG developed ‘Our Say’ – Youth Lived Experience FAQs, to ensure meaningful engagement during consultations. This resource compiles YRG members’ thoughts, addressing foundational questions often asked during consultations and advocacy work. These questions are necessary for authentic co-production, but young people can feel burnt out and unheard by repeatedly sharing their thoughts. ‘Our Say’ allows members to share insights without repetition at every consultation.

Approach:

‘Our Say’ begins with three broad questions about mental health services for young people. It includes 10 questions on designing accessible services, four addressing diverse communities and nine on the broader ACT mental health care system, identifying gaps, strengths and factors impacting youth mental health. The document concludes with three questions about youth engagement.

Outcome:

Published in April 2024, ‘Our Say’ has shown promising initial outcomes. Early feedback suggests it provides valuable insights into diverse youth perspectives, leading to more productive consultations. While the long-term impact is still unknown, it is anticipated to result in more youth-appropriate, accessible and effective mental health services.

Innovation and Significance:

‘Our Say’ sets a new standard for co-designing mental health services with youth input, ensuring consultations begin with user-led insights. This respects youth advocates’ time and emotional labour and enables deeper discussions. The project translates lived experience into actionable insights, offering a scalable model for other regions to enhance youth engagement and improve mental health outcomes through authentic, sustainable co-production practices.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The ACT CYMHSA YRG recognises the contributions of all members and collaborators including the Youth Coalition of the ACT. We acknowledge that we do not represent all young people. We pay our respects to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the ACT lands.

Abstract for presenting author:

Sonali is completing Honours at the Centre for Mental Health Research, where she investigates self-recognition and help-seeking for mental health conditions. A Lifeline telephone crisis supporter and member of the ACT CYMHSA YRG, Sonali contributes user-led insights to improve mental health outcomes for all, including those with diverse, intersectional backgrounds.