

# The WA Primary Health Alliance and the Mental Health System

## Who is WA Primary Health Alliance?

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) is responsible for planning, guiding and directing investment towards primary health services, including mental health services. WAPHA's role is to simplify and increase access to primary healthcare.

WAPHA is funded by the Australian Government to oversee the three Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in Western Australia – *Perth South, Perth North and WA Country*.

PHNs make decisions independent of government and are operated by not-for-profit companies. PHNs decide which services or health care interventions should be provided and who should provide them. They also work closely with providers to monitor performance and implement change.<sup>1</sup>

PHNs have two key objectives:

- To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes; and
- To improve the coordination of care to ensure patients receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

WAPHA focuses on seven priority areas, as guided by the Australian Government:

- mental health
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- population health
- digital health
- health workforce
- aged care
- alcohol and other drugs.

We aim to achieve our vision of *Better health, together* through focussing on the following target groups:

- a) **Communities experiencing enduring disadvantage.** This includes some older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, LGBTI+ communities, people in poverty or deprivation, and socially and culturally marginalised groups.
- b) **People at risk of developing significant health issues.** This includes mental disorders, problematic and harmful alcohol and drug use, chronic conditions and complex co-morbidities – for example, obesity and chronic heart failure.
- c) **People with, or at risk of, developing significant health issues.** This includes earlier intervention and management for people with co-existing chronic conditions and complex care needs in general practice, with an emphasis on data driven quality improvement and research to identify innovative solutions that supports prevention activities.
- d) **Communities facing gaps in the health system.** This includes integrating primary health care, and our commissioned services, into the local health environment through effective partnerships and utilising data informed assessments about health priorities to better address the needs of Western Australians.<sup>2</sup>

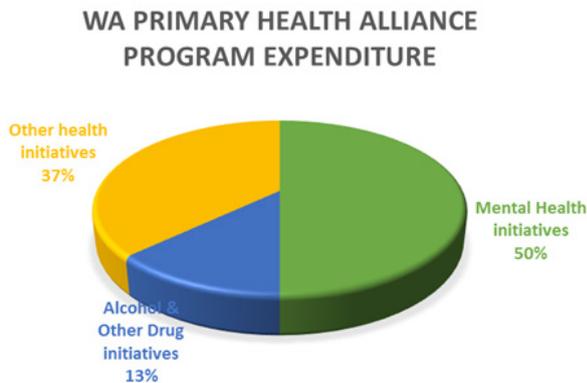
1 Australian Department of Health. *Primary Health Networks Factsheet*. 2018. Accessed on 14 January 2020 from: <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Fact-Sheet-Primary-Health-Networks+>

2 WA Primary Health Alliance. *Better Health, Together: WA Primary Health Alliance Strategic Plan 2020-2023*. 2020

## WAPHA and the mental health system

WAPHA does not directly provide mental health services, but commissions services from a wide range of providers including community managed organisations and health service providers.

Approximately 50% of WAPHA's program expenditure is on primary care mental health services, with a further 13 per cent targeting alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment.



The Australian Government provides guidance materials that determines the scope of WAPHA's mental health programs.

WAPHA primarily targets services that support people with mild-moderate mental health issues, including:

- Low intensity mental health services for early intervention.
- Psychological therapies for people who experience barriers to accessing Medicare Benefit Schedule based psychological therapy.
- Aboriginal mental health services.

There are however, discrete initiatives where the remit is different and individuals with higher support needs are targeted, including care coordination for people with severe mental illness and youth early intervention services.

Further information about WAPHA's target groups can be found at [Fact Sheet 8: Target Groups](#)

WAPHA's treatment services reach people of all ages, promote early intervention and support family members, with the aim of reducing the impact of mental illness.

A list of WAPHA's commissioned Mental Health and AOD services can be found on the [WAPHA website](#)

## Partnerships

There are other organisations in Western Australia that commission mental health services, such as the [Western Australian Mental Health Commission](#) and the [WA Department of Health](#)

WAPHA partners with these organisations to ensure coordinated planning, commissioning and service delivery across Western Australia.

The Western Australian Mental Health Commission focuses on the commissioning of services for people experiencing severe mental illness.

The Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan was released in 2017 and commits all governments to work together to achieve integration in planning and service delivery at a regional level.<sup>3</sup>

WAPHA is working with the Western Australian Mental Health Commission, the Western Australian Department of Health and the Health Service Providers to develop joint regional mental health and suicide prevention plans. This work is a key priority area of the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan.

The joint regional plans will provide a mechanism for addressing systemic problems which people with lived experience of mental illness or suicide and their carers and families currently face. This includes fragmentation of services and pathways, gaps, and duplication and inefficiencies in service provision.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government Department of Health. *The Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia 2018.



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This is one of a series of factsheets regarding mental health and primary health care, developed by WAPHA. Further factsheets and other resources can be found at [www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-framework](http://www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-framework). The information in this factsheet was accurate at December 2020.