

Mental Health Stepped Care Codesign 2023

Designing for need, not for illness

Overview

Following a comprehensive independent review completed by PwC Australia, in 2023 Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) will be partnering with key stakeholders to codesign a new model of mental health stepped care.

To ensure the future service model is designed to meet the needs of our communities, NQPHN will engage in a broad range of consultation and codesign activities with people with a lived experience of mental health challenges, carers, mental health services providers, GPs, Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) and others.

The codesign process will encourage stakeholders to think innovatively about how mental health stepped care services can be redesigned across Northern Queensland to improve access and ensure improved integration with broader mental health, primary care, and social support service systems.

The focus will be on designing services to match a person's level of need, shifting away from designing services and access points based on severity of mental illness or diagnosis.

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network

NQPHN is one of 31 PHNs established nationally by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to provide local communities with better access to improved primary healthcare services. The NQPHN region is home to approximately 700,000 people, and extends from St Lawrence in the south coast, up to the Torres Strait in the north, and west to Croydon and Kowanyama.

Our vision is for northern Queenslanders to live happier, healthier, longer lives. We aim to improve health outcomes for all residents by supporting, investing in, and working collaboratively with other health organisations and the community to deliver better primary care. You can find more information about NQPHN [here](#).

- Improved access and coordination of mental health services is one of five priority areas highlighted in NQPHN's [Strategic Plan](#).
- As part of a commitment to deliver on actions within the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, NQPHN worked in partnership with Mackay, Townsville, Cairns and Torres and Cape HHS partners to develop the foundation [Joint Regional Wellbeing Plan](#).



NQPHN acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Nation Peoples and the Traditional Custodians of this land. We respect their continued connection to land and sea, country, kin, and community. We also pay our respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging as the custodians of knowledge and lore.



Context for service redesign

In 2017-18 NQPHN commissioned mental health stepped care services across the region. The stepped care approach aims to provide a continuum of primary mental health services which, together with specialised and acute mental health services provided by HHSs, ensures a range of service types and choices for community members. In the current stepped care model, NQPHN commissions:

- a central intake, assessment, triage, and referral function ('Connect to Wellbeing')
- psychological services for people with moderate level needs
- mental health nursing services for people with higher level needs ('Mental Health Integrated Care Coordination - MHICC').

Since the implementation of these services, there have been wide ranging changes in the broader mental health system and policy context. In addition, NQPHN has received feedback from some service providers and community members that there are barriers to access and potential for improved integration of stepped care services within the broader mental health service system.

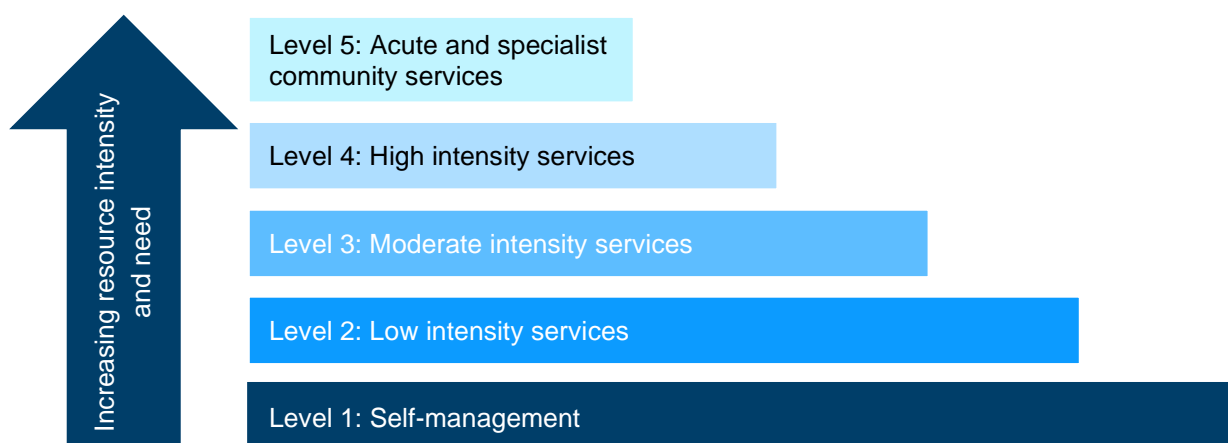
In 2022, PwC Australia were engaged to undertake a comprehensive review of NQPHN's mental health stepped care services. This review identified several strengths of the current model, along with a number of opportunities for improvement.


A key opportunity identified was for NQPHN to redesign mental health stepped care services to improve access, streamline intake and referral, enable seamless transitions in care, and improve integration.

You can read the full report [here](#).

What is mental health stepped care?

Mental health stepped care recognises that with the range of individual needs that exist, from the least to the most intensive, there is need for a range of interventions or service offerings. A stepped care approach provides the right service at the right time, with lower intensity steps available to support individuals before illness manifests.





While there are multiple levels within the stepped care approach, they do not operate in silos or as one directional steps. Rather, they offer a continuum of service interventions, where an individual is supported to transition up to higher intensity services or down to lower intensity services as their needs change. The transition of clients from one part of the system to another is critically important, particularly for a person's recovery and continuity of care.

A future service model

NQPHN aims to commission mental health stepped care services that complement and connect to other services, targeting service gaps at a population level or for priority groups in a way that contributes to an integrated system. The focus will be on designing services to match a person's level of need, shifting away from designing services and access points based on severity of mental illness or diagnosis.

NQPHN invites innovative thinking and seeks active contribution from a diverse range of stakeholders. Participation of people with a lived experience of mental health challenges will be vital.

Codesign activities will focus on a range of outcomes identified in the review of mental health stepped care services including, but not limited to those outlined below.

- Greater flexibility in referral pathways and access points.
- Streamlined processes to enter, and transition between, stepped care services.
- Increased access to low intensity mental health services.
- Improved access to moderate and high intensity services for those most in need, including those in rural and remote areas.
- Improved workforce capacity and capability, including increased utilisation of the peer workforce.
- Increased access to a range of service modalities (eg. digital, virtual, group services).
- Improved access to culturally safe services for First Nations peoples.
- Improved access to tailored services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Improved access to tailored services for the LGBTIQ+ communities.
- Greater integration between the stepped care services.
- Greater integration between stepped care and the broader mental health and human service systems.
- Improved communication and coordination with GPs and General Practices.

From March to July 2023, NQPHN will take a phased approach to codesigning stepped care services.

- Intake, assessment, triage, and referral services, along with low intensity mental health services, will be a focus throughout all codesign activities.
- Codesign sessions in **March** will focus on services for people with high intensity needs.
- Codesign sessions in **May** will focus on services for people with moderate intensity needs.
- Codesign sessions in **June** will focus on the entire stepped care model.

Outside of these workshops, stakeholders can request an in-person or virtual meeting with NQPHN. For more information, please email MHAODplanning@nqphn.com.au.