



ISANA SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

MENTAL HEALTH DRAFT REPORT October 2019

The Australian Government invites examination of the draft report and comment on it by written submission or comment to the Productivity Commission, preferably in electronic format, by 23 January 2020 and/or by attending a public hearing.

The final report will be prepared after further submissions and comments have been received and public hearings have been held and will be forward to the Australian Government by end May 2020.

The Commission's report is in two volumes. Volume 1 contains the overview, recommendations and findings and chapters 1 to 16. Volume 2 contains chapters 17 to 26, appendices A to E and references

About ISANA: International Education Association

ISANA: International Education Association is the national professional association that represents people working with international students in Australia. It is a well-respected membership body that has provided services to international students and the professional staff who work with them since 1989. ISANA is a voluntary organisation, comprising a National Council, State and Territory branches and a general membership, with all office bearers elected by members. The association plays a key role in contributing to improving international student experience through policy and practice.

ISANA members work in universities, colleges and schools as well as with public and private organisations, making it unique as a cross-sectoral body engaging effectively with people working directly with students. Members are employed in administration, student support, compliance, policy, teaching and teaching support, in management and international education leadership roles as well as in service providers.

ISANA has a dynamic relationship with groups whose responsibilities connect with international students' experience. It has a demonstrated record of collaboration with relevant organisations such as student representative organisations, government agencies, accommodation providers, police, fire, health, insurance, emergency services, community organisations and guardians. It is therefore responsive to issues that arise such as cultural adjustment, academic progress, health and wellbeing, safety and security, as well as the needs of younger students.

ISANA has always taken an active interest in the development of government and institutional policy, and the impact of policy on international students. ISANA was granted a 2018 Enabling Growth and Innovations grant to develop an updated instructional Tutorial on the 2018 National Code and has also received grants for various international student support Projects under the Student Welfare Program. It has engaged with government through a number of taskforce and consultative groups, contributing to dialogue relating to international student matters. It is through the above mission that ISANA comments on this draft report.

A Path for Maintainable Long Term Reform

Reform area 1: prevention and early intervention for mental illness and suicide attempts

Early Help for people

Wellness packages to be provided explaining the importance of a balanced lifestyle. Promote healthy, mind, body and spirit. Discussions about healthy low budget meals, the importance of exercise, a good social network and what feeds the spirit. Language and context connections are very important with talking with young people and international students. It is important to normalise help seeking behaviour.

Improving peoples' experiences with mental healthcare

Ensure Counselling services of education providers have access to a web-based portal to ask students about their health and symptoms. This system would also have a translator and the answers could help counsellors and psychologists determine the best options. This web-based system could also be linked to other well-known healthcare organisations such as:

- RUOK
- Beyond Blue
- Head Space
- Lifeline
- Black Dog Institute
- Suicide Prevention Australia

Improving peoples' experience with services beyond the health system

Wellness packages to be provided explaining the importance of a balanced lifestyle. Promote healthy, mind, body and spirit. Discussions about healthy low budget meals, the importance of exercise, a good social network and what feeds the spirit.

Increasing the participation of people with mental illness in education and work

Education and support to students on how to manage mental health at work and school, ongoing support to be given by education providers as duty of care to their students. Training and role-play videos to help students and counsellors tackle unforeseen challenges.

Reforming the funding and commissioning of services and supports

Students need to be informed on how to access their healthcare to full potential. Many Overseas Health Care (OHSC) providers have 24 hour helplines International Students can access.

Reform area 2: close critical gaps in healthcare services

Early Help for people

All education providers must ensure students are aware of their counselling services and how to access them.

Target e-health campaigns with different topics i.e. daily mood chart; what is depression; how exercise/diet can help my moods.

Translation into other languages by an expert of critical information.

Improving peoples' experiences with mental healthcare

Demystify what it means to attend an appointment with eg. a Counsellor. Explain their role and how confidentiality works.

Improving peoples' experience with services beyond the health system

This is directly linked to student experience and safety; student dignity and experience must come first. Students must understand how they can be supported for their best outcome of the services provided.

Increasing the participation of people with mental illness in education and work

Take opportunities to have those willing to speak about their own experience navigating education, work and health related services.

Reforming the funding and commissioning of services and supports

Always accept a person who self-presents to a health service even if they cannot produce their health care card. Accept this initial consultation, or in critical cases one bed night as an upfront cost. Turning someone away and causing more anxiety after the effort it took to come to the service, causes more harm than good.

Reform area 3: investment in services beyond health

Early Help for people

Invest in social media campaigns to demystify services; raise awareness of services; and the more they are talked about the more 'normal' accessing services becomes.

Help lines and poster campaigns.

Improving peoples' experiences with mental healthcare

Survey those who have accessed a mental healthcare service and identify what they saw as the 'reality' verse 'expectation' of accessing a service. This will inform education campaigns.

Improving peoples' experience with services beyond the health system

As above.

Increasing the participation of people with mental illness in education and work

Build education campaigns for the community to understand mental illness to understand those with one and how they can build a welcoming and supportive environment.

Reforming the funding and commissioning of services and supports

Look to good examples already established in communities and put funding to them to ensure their ongoing viability. Visibility of preventative measures is almost non-existent but this is a vital key to lessening the escalation of mental health issues.

Reform area 4: assistance for people with mental illness to get into work and enable early treatment of work-related mental illness

Early Help for people

Improving peoples' experiences with mental healthcare

Improving peoples' experience with services beyond the health system

Increasing the participation of people with mental illness in education and work

Reforming the funding and commissioning of services and supports

Reform area 5: fundamental reform to care coordination, governance and funding arrangements

Early Help for people

Improving peoples' experiences with mental healthcare

Improving peoples' experience with services beyond the health system

Increasing the participation of people with mental illness in education and work

Reforming the funding and commissioning of services and supports

International Students specific issues

International Students are required to purchase health care (OSHC) for the length of their student visa. However the basic requirement is at most only equivalent to Medicare. Students are required to purchase additional services and in many cases they are unaware of these or do not see the need for them; also they must meet waiting periods for many services before being allowed to access them.

Possible solution:

Lift the level of OSHC students are required to purchase

Remove waiting periods – can do so by charging a larger excess if services accessed within a certain timeframe

Students who fall pregnant face thousands of dollars in medical bills due to waiting periods and end up experiencing enormous emotional and financial stress all while trying to cope with a new born and their studies.

Possible solution:

Remove waiting periods – can do so by charging a larger excess if services accessed within a certain timeframe

Education providers can recount stories of students being 'dumped' by their family with a pre-existing medical condition. This removes their child from possible 'stigma' around mental health issues in their home country.

Possible solution:

Demystify the notion that a student will not receive a student visa if they declare they have a pre-existing condition and come with medication and information about ongoing care or medical needs.

Students arrive with many months' worth of medication, however once used they do not attend a doctor in Australia to get a new prescription as they choose to wait till they return home to visit their own doctor. However during this period their symptoms re-surface and education providers are left to deal with the results.

Possible solution:

In concert with above solution have an education campaign for students about the need to continue with their medication and how to source authorised alternatives while in Australia.

Conclusion

ISANA as an active professional network, is in a privileged position to observe issues, evaluate programs and initiate solutions, particularly in relation to the experiences of international students. Our collective historical knowledge and capabilities can be used to develop and facilitate the conditions needed to better understand the issues our international students face and the opportunities they afford and, as many of our members operate in organisations other than education institutions, we are well equipped to advise on these matters. We look forward to contributing further in this area.

Bronwyn Gilson
National President
28 January 2020