Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health

22 January 2020

United Synergies would like to make the following comments in response to the draft Inquiry into the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health.

United Synergies has been operating headspace centres for over seven years, successfully establishing five centres across three PHN regions including:

- headspace Maroochydore in 2012-2013;
- headspace Toowoomba in 2013-2014;
- headspace Caboolture in 2015-2016;
- headspace Bundaberg in 2016-2017, and most recently
- headspace Gympie, opening late 2018.

In 2018 – 2019 alone, across its five headspace centres, almost 3,700 young people were assisted including over 14,000 clinical appointments. Of these approximately 10% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

With the benefit of this comprehensive experience, United Synergies’ believes key strengths of the headspace program includes it’s youth focus, youth engagement in centre design and operation, the development of community and service partnerships, and garnering community confidence. Accordingly, we believe, headspace centres are established with the young people themselves at the epicentre of a headspace service and all local decisions.

Supporting these underlying strengths of the headspace model are:

**Youth Participation:** As a youth-based organisation, youth involvement as an essential component to service design and provision. Local Youth Engagement Committees (YEC) are instrumental in this. Monthly meetings provide input towards service design, delivery, event planning and design of engagement strategies. As an example of such engagement, attached in Appendix A, is feedback from a YEC workshop discussing, ‘what is important for your headspace’, ‘what would keep you connected to headspace’, and ‘what do the young people of [headspace centre name] need?’.

**Family and Friend’s Participation:** The provision of parent support groups supported by appropriate promotional materials and publications and school-based connections.
**Local community events**: Participation in local community events providing an opportunity to engage with young people, their families, and friends.

**Removal of Barriers**: headspace centres actively seek opportunities to build awareness of services with minority and high-risk groups.

When commencing or considering proposed new headspace centres we have experienced strong engagement and desire from stakeholders to be part of the service delivery and engaged as consortium partners. This stakeholder engagement positions the headspace centres with a strong understanding of the needs of the region and the key requirements for the local headspace centre.

Accordingly, we would like to provide our organisations feedback to the Productivity Commission Inquiry that headspace remains as a holistic primary care platform that deeply engages with local communities allowing its services to be responsive and flexible to local needs. Further, consortiums ensure local co-ordination, effectiveness, and minimise the duplication of services. Finally, that the young people themselves are genuinely engaged on an ongoing basis to ensure fit-for-purpose services and patronage.

United Synergies would be pleased to discuss any details provided in this submission as required.

Yours respectfully,

Andrew Anderson  
CEO, United Synergies

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**About United Synergies**

United Synergies is a not-for-profit organisation, established in 1989 to help address youth homelessness in Noosa. The organisation has grown substantially since then and now work across Southern Queensland supporting more than 6000 young people each year in the areas of Child Safety, Homelessness, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. As a youth focused organisation, the majority (89%) of our services support young people under 25 years of age. With more than 30 years of experience, United Synergies has developed a reputation for effectively developing and managing value for money government contracts with consistent delivery across our KPI / outcomes. With services across more than 30 service agreements, our financial and clinical governance is well established and trusted in the health and human services sectors.
Appendix A – Youth Engagement Committee feedback

- Respect and no judgment or racism
- Board games and card games
- Technology/music
- What's important for your headspace?
- A safe space
- Comfortable people to be around
- Open door policy
- Animals for comfort
- Friendly and happy/healthy environment
- People who will listen to us

Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.
* Different Zones for Activities

what would keep you connected to headspace?

* Support with life skills
* An app for easy connection
* Support around personal issues
* Chill out space
* Fun day to gather information
* No judgement
* A good/fun environment

headspace
what do the young people of need?

Headspace centre name

* Bereavement sessions/activities/counselling
* Groups that help with addictions
* Bereavement sessions/activities/counselling
* Groups that help with addictions

Area to chill out
No judgement
Different areas for groups
Support around personal issues
Friendly environment
Designated smoking/Outside zone

* Anti-Bullying
* Trust activities

* Help with anxiety & Depression