

Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing:

The Bigger Picture



8-9 Sept 2008, Melbourne

by Rita Riedel

In early September, I was fortunate to be able to attend the 'Margins to Mainstream' conference (see page 52) and, preceding this, attended a jam-packed 2-day workshop run by VicHealth on "Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing." VicHealth is playing a dynamic role in putting mental health firmly on the mainstream agenda, and their popular 2-day course informs people of the latest developments in mental health research.

VicHealth states that our awareness of 'mental health' in Australia is now, where we were approximately 25 years ago with issues such as cancer awareness and smoking. It takes many years for general awareness to grow and for targeted advertising campaigns to impact on changes in perceptions and behaviour. Years ago, we 'baked on the beach in the hot sun'—today, policies

ensure all children wear hats in schools. Years ago, we thought smoking was 'cool and dignified'—today, images of black diseased lungs line our cigarette packets.

Working 'Up Stream'

A key focus was on the 'promotion & prevention' end of the spectrum—on 'creating health'—rather than on the 'treatment & care' end—treating illness. An analogy offered is: shifting focus from the 'bottom of the cliff' work to 'top of the cliff':

- ◆ How can we work better 'up stream' to prevent illness 'down stream'?
- ◆ How can we strengthen capacity to reduce the likelihood of illness?

While providing services to people with mental illness, how can we also create environments to help people stay well: work more upstream? This can be particularly challenging for workers in the field who often have a dual role—needing to treat illness as well as consider preventative approaches.

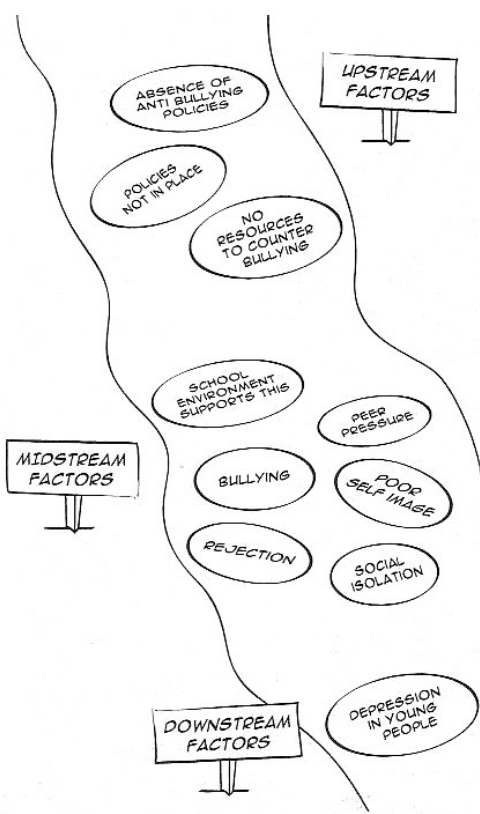
Health is created outside the health sector!

Many of the influences on mental health occur in the settings in which we live our day to day lives, such as our

Why MH Promotion?

A number of key factors influence the rationale behind VicHealth's framework and focus:

1. By the year 2020 depression will constitute the second largest cause of disease burden worldwide
2. Cost factor: The global burden of ill health is well beyond the treatment capacities—we can't cope with the existing need for treatment—and the social/economic costs will not be reduced by the treatment of mental disorders alone. We need to work on prevention at the same time as care/treatment
3. Mental health is fundamental to good physical health and quality of life. MHP will not only lower mental illness but will also help improve physical health
4. Social justice issues: Mental illness affects/is more prevalent among disadvantaged people: there is a clear need for the better distribution of resources



homes, schools, communities and work places. This means that many of the 'drivers' of mental health and wellbeing lie outside of the health care system:

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14 Social Determinants of Health

How our daily life conditions influence our wellbeing led to discussion of 14 key determinants which impact on us:

(from previous page)

◆ Mental health is dependent on social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions that require attention to ensure these conditions are conducive to mental health

◆ Social determinants—the world in which we live—plays a large role in a person’s sense of wellbeing

A whole lot of things determine health! While mental health promotion is located in the realm of mental illness, mental health is clearly more than the absence of mental illness. All practitioners have a responsibility to focus on MH promotion.

Consider - What does a healthy / well person look like?

We were all asked to list the things that make us feel happy and good about life—to describe what a healthy person looks like. Our group listed the following basic elements:

- ◆ socially connected
- ◆ inbuilt strength / resilience/ ability to bounce back
- ◆ happy
- ◆ confident
- ◆ employed
- ◆ owns own home or lives in secure housing
- ◆ physically active
- ◆ adventurous / healthy risk-taking
- ◆ well paid or access to secure income
- ◆ sense of independence and self-responsibility
- ◆ access to transport
- ◆ feels loved and has sense of self love
- ◆ sense of identity/spiritual connection
- ◆ access to education

1. The Social Gradient: Access to Economic Resources:

income and social status—the relationship between health and wealth (need to reduce income inequalities)

2. Early Life:

the emotional support we receive as children and the social/economic circumstances of our childhood (need to consider Parent Support Programs & Health Promoting schools)

3. Social Inclusion:

discrimination based on difference has devastating effects on our wellbeing (need to increase options for community belonging)

4. Employment/ Unemployment & Working Conditions:

working gives us a sense of purpose, meaning & reward (need to improve job opportunities and quality of working conditions)

5. Social Supports:

friendships and belonging are vital to our health and wellbeing (need to foster)

6. Food Security:

the cost, access to, variety and availability of quality food

7. Education:

how different levels affect employment opportunities

8. Gender:

can affect our work roles/opportunities and stress levels

9. Discrimination & Diversity:

in any form against cultural background, age, sexuality, religion, gender or ability has very dire effects on our self-esteem and wellbeing (need to foster tolerance and inclusion)

10. Addictions & Substance Misuse:

influence accompanying ‘burden of disease’ and social issues (eg. alcohol influencing violence, road accidents/trauma and mental illness)

11. Environments:

our physical, social, economic and natural environments have a significant impact (need to create/build spaces where we can walk to shops, relax, feel safe)

12. Transport:

impacts on our ability to access employment, social connections, food etc (need to provide greater equitable access)

13. Personal Health Practices & Coping Skills:

information and education to develop skills and empower people to make best choices

14. Violence:

has dire consequences, including self-directed and psychological (bullying)

A healthy person has choices ...

In defining health promotion, the Ottawa Charter (1986) states:

‘Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health.’ Plus: To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing an individual or group must be able to identify and realise aspirations, to satisfy needs and to change or cope with the environment. (Nutbeam, 1986)

That is: A healthy person has choices – and can choose ‘the best choice’ in given situations. A healthy person can also delay gratification for longer-term benefit rather than act impulsively for instant gratification in the short-term.

In considering mental health promotion: how can we enable people to make ‘best choices’?

Bigger picture approach

Only changing one key area alone is unlikely to work. We need to look at range of social determinant factors: such as, to help smaller disadvantaged groups consider a bigger population approach. For example, to help children who don't have access to healthy foods at home, introduce healthy foods (such as fruit) in the whole school.

While in clinical treatments the emphasis is on the down-stream ie. individuals, in MHP the emphasis is on upstream, ie. the bigger picture. We need to consider not just 'emergency responses' but planned long-term mental health promotion approaches.



'Unpacking Issues'

In MHP the act of 'unpacking issues' is important: explore what is happening further upstream which impacts on the down-stream. Equally, use information gathered downstream to inform better decisions, programs and planning upstream.

Consider the analogy of 'the iceberg beneath the surface'. For example, a down-stream issue might be "young people & depression." The young people's behaviour is what we can see/observe – the tip above the water. But what are the larger underlying structures that influence this behaviour? Unpacking this issue and looking further upstream we might find:

- ◆ a lack of social and community activities – boredom
- ◆ poor social environments – including bullying at school, unsafe streets
- ◆ no school policies against bullying
- ◆ unsafe housing

While in the short-term we can treat young peoples' depression with medication and counseling, unless we explore and change the larger

10 Key Action Areas for Health Promotion



1. Build healthy public policy

This takes years but can only work with community action/support (eg. sun-smart schools 'no hat no play'; banning smoking in workplaces, pubs and restaurants)

2. Create supportive environments - All of life—both work and leisure—should be source of health, where health promotion generates living/working conditions that are safe, stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable; creating health promoting workplaces, schools, night clubs (free water), arts venues, neighbourhoods (urban planning eg. walking to parks), shopping centres, sports clubs

3. Strengthen community action - Support self-help & advocacy groups and facilitate the skills to do this

4. Develop personal skills Supporting personal & social development through providing information & education to enhance people's life skills and give them more options and control over their wellbeing

5. Reorient health services towards primary health care Focusing on a 'whole population' approach not just 'treating the individual': the responsibility for HP is shared among individuals, community groups, health professionals, health service institutions and governments

6. Promote social responsibility for health

For example, hotels offering free soft-drinks to 'Driver Bob', and many fast food companies now including healthy options on their menus

7. Increasing investment for health development to address health and social inequities - A multi-sectoral approach addressing inequalities (eg. VicHealth being supported by the government)

8. Consolidate and expand partnerships for health Valuable for sharing expertise, skills and resources Eg. Beyondblue collaborating with Netball Australia to help raise awareness about depression.

9. Strengthen communities and increase community capacity - Empowering individuals through advocacy, and building alliances to strengthen cooperation & better access to resources

10. Secure an infrastructure for Health Promotion - Governments have a responsibility to establish a strong infrastructure, including a funded commitment to HP, and services improving planning and evaluation to get 'good evidence' to help secure funding for future projects

determinants impacting on their lives these issues are likely to continue.

Significance of the 10 Action Areas

◆ Health promotion (HP) involves the population as a whole in the context of their everyday lives. It also focuses on sub-populations vulnerable to ill health due to socio-economic disadvantage or geographic isolation

◆ HP is directed to improving people's control over the determinants of health

◆ HP is a process – it leads to something; it is a means to an end

◆ HP is conscious-raising about the determinants of health, both for communities and populations, and for workers

◆ HP is enabling – it is done by, with and for people, not on them; it encourages participation (cont. next page)

“Health promotion is a powerful, cost-effective and efficient way to maintain a healthier community. It enables people to increase control over and improve their health. Rather than focusing on people at risk for specific diseases, health promotion involves the population as a whole in the context of their everyday lives. Activities are geared toward promoting health and preventing ill-health.”

VicHealth website

(from previous page)

- ◆ HP involves a combination of complementary approaches
- ◆ Everyone and every sector has a role to play in promoting health

Summary of Key Points

- ◆ Health is created outside the health sector – in wide range of settings: home, school, work, social, community
- ◆ Focus on ‘creating health’ as opposed to treating illness
- ◆ Value of ‘unpacking issues’ – what’s happening further upstream?
- ◆ Bigger picture focus – ‘mental health promotion’ involves not just treating people but also lobbying for bigger picture changes: the wide range of social determinants influence ‘mental health’
- ◆ Focus on populations base not just individuals
- ◆ Value of partnerships – working with other services to maximise resources and benefits
- ◆ Targeting ‘the ones we don’t see’ – how can we do this better? ☒

For more further information on Mental Health Promotion training or the VicHealth Mental Health Framework email cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

depressionNet

supporting those living with depression

workingwell



An initiative of depressionNet, Working Well is a great website for employers and employees which provides information on:

- ◆ Workplace stress (causes & how to alleviate)
 - ◆ Depression (types, symptoms, causes and treatments)
 - ◆ Well workplaces (indoor conditions, lighting, diets, indoor plants)
 - ◆ List of resources on health professionals, workplace support & community support

Interactive peer support ...

Working Well provides a unique interactive human service for employees and employers impacted by mild to moderate depression, integrating peer and professional support services.

We provide peer support service through which employees and employers can share stories and experiences. The service is facilitated by Peer Support Staff and Volunteers, ensuring clients are well supported and encourages participation within the peer support environment.

We will soon offer free online counselling via the depressionNet Professional Support Service.

With a strong consideration of the statistic that suggests one-in-five Australians experience depression at some stage in their adult lifetime, the service incorporates information, ideas and advice on reducing stressors in the workplace so that the service is relevant not only to employees living with depression, but will provide ideas on improving and maintaining mental wellbeing in the workplace.

New Partnerships ...

Working Well is also beginning to work in partnership with Mental health @ Work—an international organisation aimed at improving the wellbeing and productivity of people and workplaces—and the Lifeline StressDown initiative. ☒



www.workingwell.org.au

www.mhatwork.com.au

www.stressdown.org.au