

Now is the time for better mental health and addiction services

By July the Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry will have reached out to communities from Whāngārei to Invercargill as part of the formal Inquiry process launched in Palmerston North on 27 April 2018.

THE MENTAL HEALTH and addiction inquiry panel - consisting of Professor Ron Paterson, Dr Barbara Disley, Sir Mason Durie, Dean Rangihuna, Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath and Josiah Tualamali'i - is determined to meet the Government's timeframe of delivering a "solutions based" report by the end of October.

As featured in the March edition of *Working Life* this is an Inquiry that PSA members fought hard to see happen.

PSA National Secretary Erin Polaczuk: "It is telling that the public meetings held around the country by the Inquiry panel are only just beginning to scratch the surface of a discussion on mental health and addiction that is deep, painful for many and long overdue."

The phased process being run for the Inquiry has combined public-facing forums with a call for submissions that closed on 5 June after attracting some 5000 responses.

At that point Inquiry chair Ron Paterson observed that a strong sense was emerging of people's main concerns and ideas, along with "some unique local and cultural issues".

"Our purpose is to identify unmet needs and develop recommendations for a better mental health and addiction system for Aotearoa New Zealand."



BRINGING MEMBERS' VOICES TO THE FORE

For its part the PSA has been pushing hard at every opportunity for face-to-face, worker-only sessions with the panel.

A submission has been made to the Inquiry with input from PSA's Mental Health Committee. This

drew directly on survey responses from 500 members to questions about key issues such as workforce shortages and ideas for improved service delivery. It was complemented by a PSAY submission based on survey responses from another 149 members.

Professor Paterson states that meetings will go on with individuals and groups - including people with mental health and addiction challenges, their families and whānau, service providers, advocates, organisations, institutions and experts - through to late August.

He has also given an assurance that the final report will contain recommendations about mental health, addiction and suicide prevention that are "practical and doable - for the short and long term and at national and local level." ☺



PSA organiser Maddy Drew was on hand for the Inquiry panel when it met mental health and addiction workers from Hutt Valley DHB and wider Community on 22 May.

Maddy, who is based three days a week at Hutt Hospital, is seen here in deep discussion with a member of the team supporting the panel as it has been making its way around more than 20 locations.

On the Road

JOSIAH TUALAMALI'I chairs the Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation Council (PYLAT) and has brought a youth perspective to the Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry panel. Josiah shares some insights from the experience of being on the panel here:

Talofa lava whanau. Out on the road with the Inquiry panel we've been hearing from young people at school, some who have accessed mental health or addictions support and others who are speaking out against the stigma that exists which prevents people from asking for help. Some have taken steps like putting work on hold to support their family members' wellbeing fulltime.

As the youth voice on the panel I've been inspired by these signs and examples of hope.

At St John's College in Hastings we met a group of 9 young men who, supported by staff, have created a strong relationship with a mental health provider, the Whatever It Takes Trust (WIT).

The students have visited clients at WIT multiple times in 2018 to get to know them. The mana of the young men and the WIT clients is being enhanced.

One of the amazing wahine toa I've met on the road is Lucy McSweeny, who presented a petition signed by 9,500 people to Parliament last year.

Lucy would like to see an Aotearoa where there is better mental health education in all schools. While pushing forward the petition, she has been visiting schools sharing her story. One of the key ideas Lucy shared with the Inquiry panel was



Josiah Tualamali'i at centre, with from left to right: Billy West, PSA delegate from Pathways; Sue McCullough, PSA organiser; Tarn Evans, PSA delegate from LinkPeople; and Alex Ward, PSA organiser.

how it's not realistic to expect young people to turn to their parents or counsellors for support when they are going through tough times, but they do talk with their friends.

A gem from this korero was the ideal of focusing wellbeing education on how to be an awesome friend, and how supporting a friend through a hard time is a practical way to take in the message for yourself too.

One visit that has left a significant impression on me was meeting young men who have completed Duke of Edinburgh awards, run marathons, grow their own garden, fix bicycles, paint beautiful murals and more, all inside a Corrections unit.

In Dunedin I met inspirational Vicki Taylor from the PSA, and learnt about the work done by the Yes We Care campaign last year to address our suicide statistics and about the safe space it provided for many people to connect and share their stories and hope.

In each of these examples young people have shared what the ideal, healthy Aotearoa would look like. They are living it now. We are so grateful for the taonga that we've heard from so many people.

So far, as a panel we have attended over 160 meetings with community groups and organisations and will continue meetings with interested people, including youth, student and school groups through until August. 🌍

Tracking the progress of the Inquiry

Full details about the process being followed by the Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry are available at www.mentalhealth.inquiry.govt.nz

PSA is including updates on the progress of the Inquiry on our social media channels, in *PSA News* and on our campaign page at www.psa.org.nz/media/campaigns #standtogetherformentalhealth