



ACT
Mental Health
Consumer Network

24 November 2023

Georgia Ward
Information and Data Manager
Justice Health Services
Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drugs Division
Canberra Health Services

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Dear Ms Ward

Review of Canberra Health Services – Guideline: Forensic Consultation and Intervention Service (FoCIS) (adults and adolescents).

This letter has been prepared by the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) in response to the invitation from Canberra Health Services (CHS). It incorporates both written and verbal feedback received from consumers in relation to the *Canberra Health Services Guideline: Forensic Consultation and Intervention Service (FoCIS) (adults and adolescents)* (FoCIS Guideline).

The Network welcomes the invitation to provide feedback on the FoCIS Guideline.

Consumers approved of the preventative focus and consultative function of the FoCIS team and highlighted the significant positive potential of specialised interventions to prevent the incidence of harm as well as facilitate transitions between in-patient and community care settings.

However, consumers expressed concern with some elements of the FoCIS Guideline. Namely, the absence of guidance regarding the consultation for and interventions with children and adolescents; the timeliness of urgent and non-urgent FoCIS consultations and interventions; and the apparent limitations of the FoCIS intervention service.

Consumers noted that the purview of FoCIS includes referrals involving children and adolescents. Recognising the elevated duty of care owed by CHS to children and adolescents when engaged with them, consumers proposed making an additional special population in Section 2 with an additional subheading and accompanying statement. This statement should provide guidance regarding the relevant legislation as well as CHS procedures and policies that FoCIS staff must be aware of when conducting consultations and/or interventions involving adolescents and children.

Given that FoCIS is intended to assist high risk Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drugs Services (MHJHADS) teams and active consumers, questions were raised regarding the timeliness of the proposed the scheduling and completion of assessments. Consumers proposed that additional consideration be given to providing referring teams and referred consumers with appropriate communication pathways for signalling the escalation of risk and urgency of FoCIS support.

Lastly, consumers observed that FoCIS's referral pathway seems to be an extremely narrow channel. Consequently, they questioned the likelihood that MHJHADS consumers who are at high risk of engaging in harmful behaviours will be successfully identified and referred to FoCIS for preventative intervention. While consumers understood that preventative intervention is difficult to effect, they nevertheless saw great potential in this aspect of the FoCIS team and requested that further consideration be given to improving the responsiveness of the intervention service.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this feedback, please do not hesitate to contact us on 02 6230 5796 or policy@actmhc.org.au.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the FoCIS Guideline. We look forward to receiving a reply identifying where these recommendations have been included or the rationale behind not including them.

The Network looks forward to receiving further consultation requests in future.

Yours sincerely



Dalane Drexler
Chief Executive Officer