

Our Youth Mental Health

Proposal for dedicated *headspace* in Manningham

Young people in Manningham are facing a mental health crisis.

With youth mental health already worsening before COVID-19, we are now seeing a **48% increase** in demand for these services in the past year alone. Suicide is the leading cause of death for our 15 to 24 year olds.

With no dedicated youth mental health service, those suffering are facing wait times of months for services outside of the municipality. Limited public transport means even then, young people are facing extensive travel times to get to the nearest *headspace*.

We need a dedicated *headspace* to support our young people, now and into the future.

Demand for youth mental health services has increased by **48% in the last year**

More than 60,000 young people call Manningham and our neighbours in Whitehorse home

Current wait time for help through existing *headspace* centres is up to **six months**

Leading cause of death for our 15 to 24 year olds is **suicide**

Limited public transport means travelling to get help can take **more than 80 minutes**

We have a culturally diverse youth population with a **quarter of young people born overseas**



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MANNINGHAM

THE PROBLEM

Currently, Hawthorn *headspace* has a three to six month wait for services - **their one day per week outreach program** cannot possibly provide for more than 60,000 young people living in Manningham and our neighbouring municipality Whitehorse. Other *headspace* centres such as Greensborough have a wait list of up to six months.

In the past year, demand for youth mental health support has **grown by 48%**. Pre COVID-19, we saw a **30% increase** in young people seeking help in 2019. The need for more services is not going away.

The cost of not responding to this crisis in our community is potentially catastrophic.

Unmet needs

Manningham has minimal youth mental health services. An increasing number of young people need to access services located outside of the municipality. Limited public transport means to access Commonwealth funded services, our youth are facing travel times of around two hours – often involving multiple bus routes and long walking distances.

Even before the pandemic, data shows there was a serious unmet need for youth mental health services. COVID-19 undoubtedly placed even greater stress on our young people, with widespread deterioration of mental health and reported incidences of suicide ideation on the rise. The Commonwealth Government's Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and COVID-19 responses support increased resourcing, however the Manningham community has been again overlooked in recent funding announcements.

We desperately need funding for a dedicated *headspace* in Manningham, to meet this urgent demand and support our young people.

Culturally diverse youth population

The youth population from a CALD background in Manningham and Whitehorse is expected to grow. These groups are less likely to seek help for mental health issues due to language barriers, cultural beliefs and a stigma around poor mental health and seeking help⁴.

A quarter of our youth are born overseas, with the majority of those born in China, and Whitehorse has a similar profile. With Doncaster Hill located near the border between the two municipalities, it is envisioned a dedicated *headspace* service in Manningham would provide a culturally appropriate service to both communities. Whitehorse Council wholeheartedly supports this.

Demand is widespread

Manningham is widely regarded as being safe, friendly and welcoming. Data from the ABS supports this, with Manningham experiencing lower levels of socio-economic disadvantage than most Australian municipalities. However, research shows that youth mental health issues are not limited to lower socio-economic areas. Our own research found that youth mental health issues are often highly complex, requiring skilled health interventions to prevent further deterioration and lasting damage. Unfortunately, the municipality's strong performance on socio-economic indicators is implicated in lower rates of government investment⁴.

Difficulty in accessing services

Even with two designated Major Activity Centres within Manningham, we are still poorly serviced by public transport, with buses the only means of public transport available. We are the only metropolitan municipality in Melbourne to be without train and tram services. When compared to other nearby Major Activity Centres, we also lack health and tertiary education services, where mental health services are frequently co-located.

Why a *headspace*?

Young people tell us that *headspace* has good brand recognition, has a good reputation, uses a medical model of care and is relatively easy to navigate once they have an initial appointment. It is our preference that a well-regarded and branded service like *headspace* is based within central Manningham.

An urgent need

Youth workers and school wellbeing officers funded through Council are not medical professionals. They are finding it difficult to refer young people to appropriate services, without them facing weeks or even months of waiting.

With about 75% of mental health problems emerging before 25 years old, the consequences of mental ill-health can continue to impact into adulthood – impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults⁸. Youth suicide is the leading cause of death for 15-24 years olds⁹.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing issues and contributed to significantly increased presentations of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation due to social isolation, loss of employment and remote learning¹⁰.

Role of schools

Local schools do their best to address youth mental health however their broad focus and large school communities limit their ability to build an ongoing rapport with students in distress. Young people have told us of their varied experiences with school staff and their disappointment in the range of supports offered.

Lack of public transport

Poor access to public transport results in difficulty accessing services. A secondary impact includes worsening isolation and depression⁵. 85% of young people who engage with Manningham's youth services are under 18, and rely on public transport to get around⁴.

Extensive travel times

If youth wish to access *headspace* at locations outside of Manningham, they face travel times of up to 80 minutes via bus and train.

Youth travelling from the more isolated suburbs of Manningham (Park Orchards, Ringwood North, Warrandyte South and Wonga Park) need to utilise multiple connecting bus routes to access their nearest service⁶. Additionally, travel times from the more isolated suburbs mean that they would only be able to access their nearest service within their operating hours on some (not all) days of the week, so they are further limited in the number of appointments available to be booked, and often there is no way that a young person could reach a *headspace* service after school.

All public transport routes involve walking between bus/train stops, interchanges and the services. This is a further barrier to access for youth with a disability.

Ability to get to a *headspace* independently

Many young people prefer to seek mental health support without the knowledge of their parents. Being able to access services through public transport without being driven to the appointments by parents is critical to better health outcomes.

As young people cannot easily access the existing youth mental health services, they face poorer outcomes including failing to complete school, under/unemployment, partaking in self-harm, or suicide^{7,8}.

"I thought I was the only one going through it. I was worried about how it was affecting the people around me"

Alex, 15, Doncaster East

"It's really hard to know where to go get help. So many of my friends are struggling and don't know where to go"

Troy, 16, Doncaster

"headspace is a good option because it's so well-known and trustworthy. That's important to us"

Chloe, 17, Templestowe

THE SOLUTION

There is an urgent need for a dedicated *headspace* service in Manningham that would serve the needs of our young people and those from our neighbours in Whitehorse.

Youth mental health is a huge problem, recognised across all levels of government with broad electoral support.

Youth-specific mental health services are recognised as the preferred treatment option. A dedicated *headspace* service in Manningham is supported by Access Health (operators of *headspace* Hawthorn), Whitehorse Council, Doncare, local schools and the Youth Advisory Council.

Our Councillors recently ranked youth mental health as the second most important issue in Manningham and is a priority in our Healthy City Strategy 2017-21. The State Government is fully committed to implementing all recommendations from the recent Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, including three relating directly to youth¹¹.

After being overlooked again by the Commonwealth Government's recent funding announcements we desperately need funding for a dedicated *headspace* in Manningham, supporting the specific needs of our young people.

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