

# Alliance Report: July 2023 to December 2024

A Mechanism for Collaboration: The ACT  
Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance

The Office for  
Mental Health  
and Wellbeing

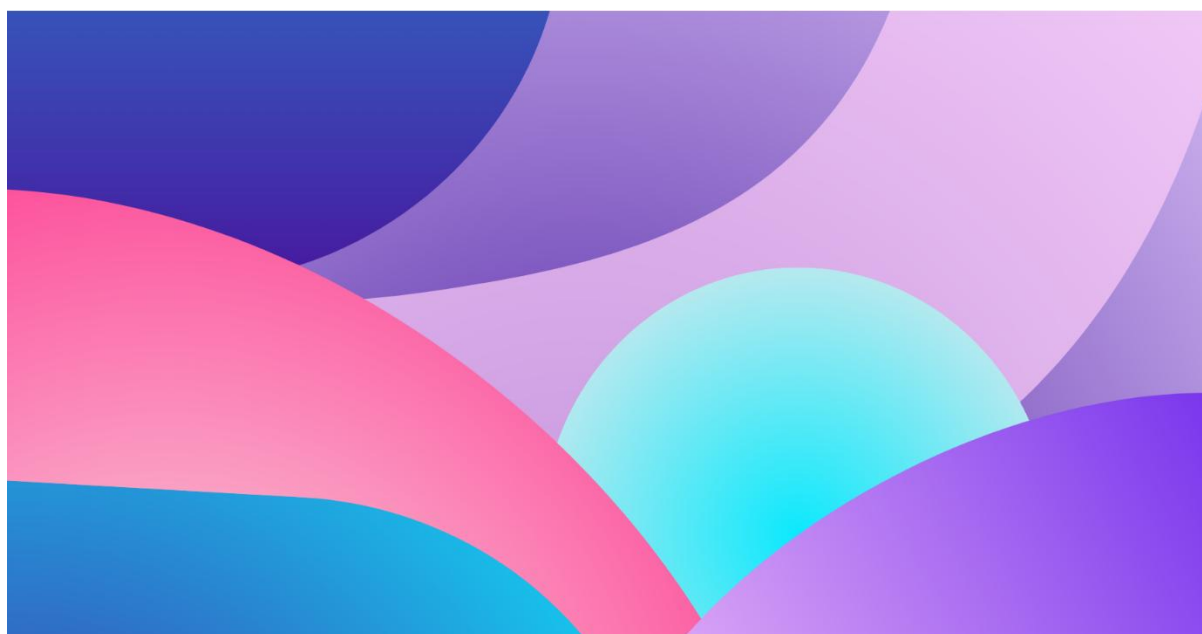


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The ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Owners and continuing Custodians of the lands of the ACT and pay our respects to the Elders, and Ancestors, and to children, young people and families. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern-day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination, and land. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

The Alliance also acknowledges those with lived experience of mental health, including those who are in caring roles. Learning from, valuing, and seeking to improve the service system experiences of children and young people is at the heart of the Alliance. We extend our gratitude to the young people involved in the work of the Alliance, for generously sharing their views and contributing a contemporary perspective to this work.



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Report prepared by the Alliance lead agencies: Erin Barry (Youth Coalition), Stephanie Lentern (Capital Health Network) and Lee-Anne Rogers (Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing).

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## Acknowledgements

The establishment and delivery of the *ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance* is the result of sustained effort and collaboration from a wide range of individuals, programs, and organisations in the ACT. The Alliance deeply appreciates the commitment of each stakeholder in working towards a more integrated and effective service system.

The ACT Government has played a key role in supporting both the establishment and ongoing delivery of the Alliance. The Alliance extends its sincere gratitude to Dr Sarah Miller, Dr Elizabeth Moore, former Minister Emma Davidson MLA, and Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith for their early and continued support of the Alliance, as well as Chief Minister and former Treasurer Andrew Barr MLA.

The Alliance expresses its thanks to the members of the Coordinating Committee, Youth Reference Group, and Alliance Working Group, for their valuable contributions to the Alliance's work. We also extend our appreciation to the broader Alliance membership for their active participation (see Appendix A).

### *Coordinating Committee*

Current members: Alison Calear, Erin Barry, Carrie Coghlan, Joan Webb, Lee-Anne Rogers, Mahri Henderson, Sam Thomas, Samantha Gill, Shannon Lanza, Stephanie Lentern, Vikki Radford

Former members: Kirsten Stafford, Yvonne Gritschneider

### *Youth Reference Group*

Coordinator: Josephine (Joey) Brogden

Members: Adam Roth, Bron Thomson, Casey Barancewicz, Elian Au, Emi Callaway, Nick Barker, Sam Thomas, Shannon Lanza, Sonali Varma

### *Alliance Working Group*

Current members: Anna Foxcroft, Billieann Bambrick, Carrie Coghlan, Catherine Vonarx, Emilie Traeger, Erin Barry, Hannah Turner, Jean Fitzroy, Jodie Cottell, Joey Brogden, Lee-Anne Rogers, Paul Spooner, Penny Stott, Stephanie Hodson, Stephanie Lentern, Tamzin Oliver, Tyla Redman, Vanessa Hamilton

Former members: Annabelle Jeffries, Catherine Joseph, Hayley McLellan, Julian Wong, Laura Eason, Natalie Mozier, Neha Kumar, Yvonne Gritschneider

## Executive Summary

The *ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance* offers a structured, formal mechanism for multiple stakeholder groups to connect and work collaboratively towards improved service system responses for children and young people experiencing mental health concerns. The Alliance is a partnership between the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing (OMHW), Capital Health Network (CHN), and the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition).

The Alliance recognises that responsibility for child and youth mental health extends beyond any single sector and is a shared, whole-of-community responsibility. Membership includes representatives from government and community programs, research institutions, private services, and individuals with lived experience.

## Background and Establishment

Findings from the ACT Government [‘Missing Middle’](#) project highlighted a range of barriers and challenges at the service, sector, and systemic level, including system fragmentation, all of which contribute to negative service system experiences for children, young people, and families. The ‘missing middle’ is a national mental health issue, and this project provided insights into why and how it manifests within the ACT. The complexity of these challenges underscored the need for a new approach to work towards shared solutions – one that fosters stronger coordination, collaboration, and shared-problem solving across sectors and the broader system.

The Alliance was formally launched in July 2023 by then-Coordinator General for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Dr Elizabeth Moore, following strategic planning throughout 2022-23 with key government and non-government stakeholders from various portfolio areas.

## Delivery of the Alliance

The Alliance undertakes a range of activities which are underpinned by backbone support and governance, including strategic coordination and collaboration, and fostering practice, information-sharing, and connection. During its first 18 months, the Alliance has delivered:

- **Biannual Forums:** Providing opportunities for Alliance members to collectively undertake strategic discussions and planning, prioritising, and decision-making. Forums included identifying initial priorities for the Alliance, sector consultations, and opportunities to build cross-sector connections and relationships.
- **Working Group and Projects:** The Alliance Working Group undertakes projects to progress the two priorities agreed upon by the Alliance: (1) improving children, young people’s and families’ experience of mental health services; and (2) improving service and system responses to children and young people with mental health concerns and complex / co-occurring concerns. More information about the projects attached to these priorities is provided in the full report.
- **Youth Reference Group (YRG):** The YRG, coordinated by the OMHW, comprised of young people aged 16-25 with lived experience of mental health. The YRG provides an accessible, flexible, and meaningful platform for young people to elevate their voices and engage with initiatives that directly affect their communities through consultation,

building relationships, and collaboration on independent projects. During 2023-24, the YRG contributed to a range of Alliance and external initiatives, and also launched the [‘Our Say’ Youth Lived Experience FAQs](#) resource.

- **Community of Practice (CoP):** Four CoP events were held, delivering service presentations from programs working with children, young people and families, along with training delivered by A Gender Agenda on *Guidance to support gender-affirming care for mental health*.
- **Communications:** A website was developed to provide a ‘digital home’ for the Alliance, and eBulletins are regularly distributed.

The Alliance is directed by a Coordinating Committee, comprised of cross-sector representatives from the Alliance membership. Secretariat support for the Alliance is provided by the Youth Coalition, with funding from the OMHW.

## Early Outcomes and Enablers

Feedback from Alliance members and observations of its activities suggest that the Alliance has:

- Strengthened cross-sector connections among diverse stakeholder cohorts, including mental health services, child, youth, and family services, government teams, local academics, peak bodies, and young people with lived experience;
- Facilitated collaborative efforts to address systemic problems that extend beyond funding streams or government programs;
- Shared understanding across sectors and systems about key issues and priorities;
- Increased engagement with and contributions from young people with lived experience in service design, implementation, research, and at the system level;
- Enhanced cross-sector awareness of child, youth and family services and initiatives across the ACT.

Alliance members have noted that the Alliance enables different parts of the system to work together to begin addressing systemic problems and pool scarce resources to achieve shared outcomes. YRG members have highlighted that the Alliance connects those using mental health services with those working professionally in the sector, creating novel opportunities to engage with and talk to each other. They emphasised that the Alliance provides a direct line of communication between young people, service providers, and policy-makers, providing a platform for young people to advocate at a systems level.

The connections fostered within the Alliance have led to a range of indirect outcomes, including local services collaborating to deliver joint programs and activities, sharing knowledge across government directorates, and creating more opportunities for both young people and system stakeholders to participate in external consultations, research, and funding opportunities.

Key factors supporting the Alliance to achieve positive outcomes include:

- **Authorising environment and partnership across lead agencies:** The collaborative partnership between community, government, and the primary health network enables the Alliance to leverage the unique capabilities and strengths of each lead agency;

whilst also fostering broader member engagement across stakeholder groups.

- **Funding and brokerage:** Funding for secretariat support has provided the essential backbone infrastructure for the Alliance. Brokerage funding for projects has aided access to external expertise and allowed the flexibility needed to advance projects effectively. Current funding expires on 30 June 2025.
- **Inclusion of youth lived experience:** The YRG brings a contemporary and nuanced perspective on child and youth mental health issues and service system experiences. Hearing directly from young people as equal stakeholders, with the same buy-in to conversations and the direction of the Alliance, supports other members to better understand young people's experiences and to challenge assumptions.
- **Member participation and engagement:** Progress on shared problems towards a system-wide improvement is only possible through the willingness and active participation of members who contribute their time and expertise. There is a positive and consistent level of engagement in Alliance activities across sectors.

## Challenges and Learnings

A key learning from Alliance delivery is that system coordination and collaboration require dedicated support and active leadership; good will is not enough, and coordination will not occur organically. Furthermore, stakeholder time and resources will always be limited, and action on agreed priorities takes time. It is essential to bring stakeholders along the journey to support meaningful change and impact.

A strength of the Alliance is its diverse membership, which includes community-based and government service providers from various sectors, young people with lived experience, policy-makers, and academics. This diversity allows the Alliance to understand and consider a broad range of perspectives. However, at times these varied experiences also lead to inherent tensions between stakeholder groups. To address this, a framing statement was developed to acknowledge this new way of working and encourage members to value and respect others' perspectives and experiences.

## Next steps

In 2025, the Alliance will continue to build upon this foundation by progressing ongoing working group projects, strengthening the community of practice, and creating cross-sector opportunities for members to connect. External initiatives that the Alliance is likely to have involvement with include commissioning of the mental health sector, delivery of the Youth at Risk trauma-informed practice training, delivery of the child and youth adaptation of the Initial Assessment and Referral Tool, transition processes from CAMHS for young people turning 18, and development of the *ACT Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy*.

Recent [research](#) (McGorry, 2024) on the impact of global megatrends upon child and youth mental health underscores the need to maintain a focus on supporting child and youth wellbeing and improving service systems. Through its shared ownership and cross-sector engagement, the Alliance provides a valuable mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate and engage in collective problem-solving.

# 1. Introduction

The *ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance* offers a structured, formal mechanism for multiple stakeholder groups to connect and work collaboratively towards improved service system responses for children and young people experiencing mental health concerns. The Alliance is a partnership between the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing (OMHW), Capital Health Network (CHN), and the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition).

The Alliance recognises that responsibility for child and youth mental health extends beyond any single sector and is a shared, whole-of-community responsibility. Membership includes representatives from government and community programs, research institutions, private services, and individuals with lived experience.

This report describes the establishment and structure of the Alliance, the activities delivered between July 2023 and December 2024, and its early outcomes, enablers, challenges, and learnings.

# 2. About this Report

This report was prepared by the lead partner agencies to reflect, document, and report on the first 18 months of establishment and delivery. It draws upon consultation processes that have occurred throughout this time, including event feedback surveys, formal group consultation processes and informal discussions with stakeholders, Alliance documentation, and the observations and reflections of lead agencies.

The structure of the report is:

- **Establishment and Governance:** Background to why and how the Alliance was established, the Alliance structure and components, and its governance, membership and funding arrangements.
- **Alliance Activities:** Overview of the biannual forums, working group activities and projects, Youth Reference Group, Community of Practice, and communications outputs.
- **Outcomes, Enablers, Challenges, and Learnings:** Early outcomes and enablers that have supported the Alliance, and the key challenges and learnings.
- **Next Steps for the Alliance:** Future plans and opportunities for continued delivery of the Alliance in 2025.

### 3. Establishment and Governance

The purpose of the Alliance is to provide:

*A structured, ongoing, formal mechanism for multiple stakeholder groups to connect and work collaboratively towards improved service system responses for children and young people experiencing mental health concerns.*

Part Three of this report describes why and how the Alliance was established, the Alliance structure and components, and its governance, membership and funding arrangements.

#### Why an Alliance: what problem are we trying to solve?

Between 2020-2022, the OMHW, CHN and the Youth Coalition partnered to conduct a consultative project to understand why some cohorts of children and young people experience difficulties accessing mental health supports in the ACT. This project led to the [ACT Government report](#) released in August 2022: *Understanding the 'Missing Middle': Children and young people with moderate to severe mental health concerns who experience difficulties accessing services.*

The project findings highlighted that a range of barriers and challenges, including system fragmentation, exist at the service, sector, and systemic levels, all of which contribute to negative service system experiences for children, young people, and families. These challenges occur within and across a wide range of sectors, including non-government, government, mental health, child, youth and family support, primary health, private services, education, child protection and justice. The 'missing middle' is a national mental health issue, and this project provided insights into why and how it manifests within the ACT.

The complexity of these barriers and challenges underscored that there is no 'quick fix' to resolve the 'missing middle', and a new approach was needed to work towards shared solutions – one that fosters stronger coordination, collaboration, and shared problem-solving. The project partners engaged with key stakeholders to explore the viability of a cross-sector mechanism that could do so.

#### Establishment of the Alliance

Strategic planning occurred in 2022-23 with government and non-government stakeholders across various portfolio areas, through individual service discussions and two cross-sector forums. This process was led by OMHW, CHN, and the Youth Coalition to co-develop the mechanism that later became the Alliance.

At the first forum in 2022, participants discussed a vision for what a cross-sector mechanism could achieve, and identified the types of processes and functions required to do this. Participants emphasised that the Alliance needed to be responsive at multiple levels, facilitating high-level strategic planning and collaboration across the system while also supporting frontline workers to connect and improve practice.

Informed by the needs and outcomes articulated by stakeholders, the lead partner agencies developed a trial structure, Terms of Reference, and program logic, and tested these with

participants at the second forum in early 2023. A Coordinating Committee was also established to provide oversight and support to the lead partners.

The Alliance was formally launched in July 2023 by the then-Coordinator General for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Dr Elizabeth Moore. At this first Alliance forum, participants identified initial priorities for the Alliance to progress (discussed further in Part Four).

## Alliance Structure

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the Alliance includes several components: (1) backbone support and governance; (2) strategic coordination and collaboration; and (3) practice, information-sharing and connection. Further information about the activities that are delivered through each component is provided in Part Four.

Figure 1.



## Governance

The leadership of the Alliance emerged organically through the 'Missing Middle' project and subsequent strategic planning for the Alliance. The Youth Coalition provides secretariat and administrative support.

A Coordinating Committee was established in June 2023 to provide oversight and guidance to the lead partner agencies to deliver the Alliance activities, and to support transparency and accountability. Members were recruited through an open EOI process, and include representatives from community-based and government mental health services, education, child, youth and family services, academia, and the Youth Reference Group. Current and former members of the Coordinating Committee are listed on page 4. Refer to the [Terms of Reference](#) for more information about the Coordinating Committee.

Governance of the Alliance is informed by a set of key principles, with the overarching commitment that the broader interests of children and young people take priority and remain central to efforts to improve the service system. Other guiding principles include: human

rights, person-centred, diversity, inclusion, equity, learning, respect, trust, participation, transparency and accountability.

In alignment with these principles and the Alliance's aims, processes and activities are designed to support shared decision-making and work towards consensus—reaching general or widespread agreement. A decision-making framework was also developed to help the Alliance prioritise key issues to progress.

## Membership

The Alliance recognises that responsibility for child and youth mental health extends beyond any single sector and is a shared, whole-of-community responsibility. Membership includes representatives from government and community programs, research institutions, private services, and individuals with lived experience.

A full list of current members is provided at Appendix A.

## Funding

Through 2022-23, each lead partner agency provided in-kind support to facilitate the strategic planning processes that shaped the Alliance model and structure, in collaboration with stakeholders. To support the secretariat and administrative functions, the OMHW provided initial grant funding to the Youth Coalition in 2023-24 to establish the Alliance, and in the 2024-25, to continue providing secretariat support. The latter funding includes brokerage for projects delivered through the Alliance Working Groups. The current funding arrangement will expire on 30 June 2025.

The OMHW and CHN have both contributed to leading the Alliance and supporting its activities, including hosting Alliance forums. The OMHW coordinates the Alliance Youth Reference Group.

## 4. Alliance Activities

Part Four provides an overview of activities delivered in the first 18 months of the Alliance, between July 2023 and December 2024.

### Alliance Forums

Alliance forums are held biannually and provide opportunities for Alliance members to collectively undertake strategic discussions, planning, prioritising, decision-making, and to develop shared understandings and goals. Three forums were held during this time, in July 2023, April 2024, and November 2024. Youth Reference Group members are invited to attend, and Alliance organisational members send 1-2 representatives from each program. Between 45-60 representatives attended each of the three forums.

[Summary Papers](#) for each forum are available through the Alliance website. Key items progressed at the forums included:

- **Determining initial priorities for the Alliance**, drawing upon issues short-listed by the Coordinating Committee;
- **Launch of the 'Our Say' Youth Lived Experience FAQs resource** for practitioners and services working with young people, by the Youth Reference Group;
- **Youth Reference Group consultation** with sector stakeholders, to inform the development of guidelines for services to engage with young people;
- Consultation related to **collecting and using feedback from children and young people** about their service experiences, to inform service improvement and selection of experience measurement tools and processes (see 'Working Group' for more information about this project);
- Consultation to inform the early development of the forthcoming **ACT Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy**;
- Consultation to inform the development of **CAMHS exit processes**, for young people turning 18;
- **Progress updates** on key child/youth mental health services, the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and from the Youth Reference Group.

The forums also provide an opportunity for government and community cross-sector stakeholders to connect and network with each other.

### Working Group and Projects

The Alliance Working Group was established in November 2023 after an EOI process to undertake activities related to the following two priorities agreed upon at the July 2023 forum:

1. *Improving children, young people's and families' experiences of mental health services*
2. *Improving service and system responses to children and young people with mental health concerns and complex / co-occurring concerns*

The Operational Statement and Minutes are available through the Alliance website. Members of the Working Group are listed on page 4. Over 12 months, the Alliance Working Group met seven times to identify and progress key projects, and to contribute to existing ACT initiatives related to the two priorities. Two key projects are being led by the Working Group, described below.

## *Project One: Supporting service readiness to collect and use client feedback from children, young people and families*

The purpose of the project is to strengthen services' capability to collect and use service experience feedback from children, young people and families. It is anticipated that this Project will be completed by June 2025. Intended project outcomes include:

- Improve shared understanding and agreements of the value of key principles and good practice approaches to collecting and using feedback;
- Develop shared understanding regarding the capacity or capability constraints and challenges for services, including support needs;
- Review existing 'experience measures' for children, young people and families; and consideration of how these align with practice approaches;
- Potential recommendations for the use of 'experience measures' and other service feedback processes.

**Phase One:** Gather and synthesise information regarding the value, key principles, and practice approaches to collecting and using client feedback, through:

- Consultations with services through the Working Group, forum and a sector survey [*completed*];
- Literature review on best practice and principles for collecting and using feedback from young people\* [*completed*];
- Consultation with young people with lived experience via the Youth Reference Group [*forthcoming*]

Deliverable: Initial Paper for Alliance membership.

**Phase Two:** Building on Phase 1, consider the implications for use of specific tools/measures within services:

- Scoping review of existing experience measurement tools for children and young people\*
- Development of recommendations for Alliance membership.

\*Dr Alyssa Morse and Ashley Hoye at the Centre for Mental Health Research at Australian National University have been contracted to undertake these literature reviews for the Alliance.

## *Project Two: Information-sharing, privacy and consent between (a) services, and (b) services and families/carers*

The purpose of this project is to address challenges regarding barriers to appropriate and ethical information-sharing for young people accessing mental health and other support services with (a) other services that young people are referred to or receiving parallel care from, and (b) parents, carers and families of young people.

It is recognised that the lack of clarity around the complex policy and legislative context in the ACT, coupled with ethical concerns around information-sharing, can lead services to avoid sharing information altogether. This includes information that could support service transition

processes, or contribute to safety and wellbeing planning. The negative consequences of this can include young people being required to repeatedly tell their stories, as well as frustration or helplessness from other services and families/carers regarding how to provide consistent care and support. Additionally, young people have identified that the absence of clear, accessible information about confidentiality and information-sharing in therapeutic contexts can discourage them from seeking help.

This project is being progressed through two avenues:

**Avenue One:** Understanding young people's preferences for good practice approaches to information-sharing, privacy, and informed consent:

- Dr Alyssa Morse and Ashley Hoye at the Centre for Mental Health Research at Australian National University have been contracted to undertake an initial literature review on this topic; prior to further consultation. This is currently underway.

**Avenue Two:** Clarifying and 'translating' existing legislation and policy related to information-sharing, privacy and informed consent.

- At December 2024, an EOI process was being undertaken to commission a six-month scoping review of relevant legislation and policy, with a view to developing translational resources for Alliance members. The review will be undertaken in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

## Youth Reference Group

The Alliance Youth Reference Group (YRG) is coordinated by the OMHW and includes up to 15 active members at any time. YRG members are young people aged 16-25 with lived experience of mental health. The YRG provides an accessible, flexible, and collaborative platform for young people in the ACT to elevate their voices and engage with initiatives that directly affect their communities. This is achieved through the key functions of (a) consultation, (b) building relationships, and (c) independent projects.

The YRG is genuinely youth-led, coordinated by a Youth Lived Experience staff member within OMHW. YRG members established their own governance structures and processes, designing them to be inclusive of the varying needs of young people with lived experience. This includes a rotating Co-Chair position and Co-Secretariat opportunities for members, development of onboarding processes for new members, and initial work towards a Member Rights and Responsibilities resource. Two of the YRG member participate on the Alliance Coordinating Committee.

In 2024, the YRG received a commendation for the Group Award at the ACT Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards and won a YOGIE Award for best practice in youth participation.

### *Independent Projects: 'Our Say' Youth Lived Experience FAQs resource*

In 2024, the YRG launched the '[Our Say](#)' resource, which compiles the broader, bigger picture questions that young people are often asked during consultations or whilst engaged in advocacy work, along with some of the YRG members' respective answers. This document was developed by YRG members as a preliminary resource to ensure those who consult with the YRG can gain the most from their time and participate in effective, meaningful engagement. It

is also available as a public resource that can be referenced, quoted, and utilised in a variety of projects. It is a valuable resource for anyone who is planning, designing or seeking to improve their service or practice.

In addition to the launch of 'Our Say', the YRG has completed early design work on a Youth Lived Experience Framework, and a Youth Lived Experience – Accessible Engagement Guide. Members of the YRG led a consultation with 40 service providers at an Alliance forum on the development of a toolkit for engaging with young people.

## *Consultation and Participation*

During 2023 and 2024, the YRG contributed to a range of external initiatives affecting young people, including:

- MindMap: Providing guidance on the development and design
- Youth at Risk Project: Consultations and co-design on trauma-informed care service design, statement and training, along with a Youth Community Art Project
- Head 2 Health Kids: Consultations on early service design
- Headspace Early Psychosis: Consultations on service design and development, representation on the Tender Assessment Panel, and reviewing potential service location sites
- ANU Mental Health Review Taskforce
- ACT Tertiary Suicide Prevention Partnership Group
- Alliance sector forums
- MIEACT – Do No Harm Training
- Headspace Tuggeranong YRG: Attending and reviewing the 'How to Adult' workshop and booklet materials
- Presentation at the national TheMHS Conference 2024
- Presentation at the 2024 Australian Association for Adolescent Health
- Meeting with the ACT Minister for Mental Health in 2024

As a result of their involvement with the YRG, members have also gone on to participate in a range of other external research and service development projects related to youth mental health in the ACT.

## *Community of Practice*

The Alliance Community of Practice (CoP) aims to provide regular opportunities for Alliance members to share and learn about relevant child and youth mental health initiatives, services, research and opportunities, and to participate in professional development and practice-based discussions.

Four CoP events were held during the first 18 months of the Alliance. The first three events were held online and focused on service presentations from programs working with children, young people and families, to provide information about service delivery and referral pathways. The most recent CoP was delivered in partnership with A Gender Agenda and included an in-person training session for Alliance members on the *Guidance to support gender-affirming care for mental health*.

## Communications

A website was created to provide a 'digital home' for the Alliance, and to enable transparency and accountability. The website provides an overview of the Alliance components and activities, including key publications such as the Youth Reference Group's 'Our Say' resource. All meeting minutes are published online, following endorsement by the relevant committee or working group.

To support the dissemination of information to Alliance members, an Alliance eBulletin is distributed to members on a monthly basis, with additional eBulletins as needed. The eBulletin provides information about initiatives, research, training, and funding opportunities related to child and youth mental health, along with updates on Alliance activities.

## 5. Outcomes, Enablers, Challenges and Learnings

Part Five provides an overview of the early outcomes and enablers, challenges, and learnings developed throughout the establishment and early delivery of the Alliance. It draws upon feedback from Alliance members through surveys, focus groups, and both formal and informal discussions.

### Early Outcomes

Feedback from Alliance members and observations of its activities suggest that the Alliance has facilitated:

- Strengthened cross-sector connections among diverse stakeholder cohorts, including mental health services, child, youth and family services, government teams, local academics, peak bodies and young people with lived experience;
- Collaborative efforts to address systemic problems that extend beyond funding streams or government programs;
- Shared understanding across sectors and systems about key issues and priorities;
- Increased engagement with and contributions from young people with lived experience in service design, implementation, research, and at the system level;
- Enhanced cross-sector awareness of child, youth and family services and initiatives across the ACT.

Alliance members have noted that the Alliance enables different parts of the system to work together to begin addressing systemic problems, pooling scarce resources to achieve shared outcomes. Forum participants often highlight the range of representatives attending from across various sectors, and value the opportunity to hear about and participate in discussions about sector initiatives. The Working Group and associated projects provide opportunities for in-depth exploration of complex system challenges and the development of strategies to address these.

YRG members have highlighted that the Alliance creates unifying opportunities for groups of people who often do not have opportunities to engage with and talk to each other, and provides a platform for young people to advocate at a systems level. They emphasised that the Alliance provides a direct line of communication between young people, service providers and policymakers. Conversely, Alliance members reflected that the inclusion of youth lived experience, via the YRG, enables lived experience participation at a system level, and sets a standard for other sectors.

The connections fostered within the Alliance have led to a range of indirect outcomes, including: local services collaborating to deliver joint programs and activities; sharing knowledge across government directorates; and creating more opportunities for both young people and system stakeholders to participate in external consultations, research and funding opportunities. YRG members noted that participation in the YRG has led to other positive, external opportunities for members.

## Enablers

Key factors supporting the Alliance to achieve positive outcomes include:

- **Authorising environment and partnership across lead agencies:** The partnership between OMHW, CHN and the Youth Coalition has been developed over several years through genuine and respectful collaboration. Alliance members reported that driving a shared partnership across community, government, and the primary health network enables the Alliance to leverage the unique capabilities and strengths of each lead agency whilst fostering broader member engagement across stakeholder groups.
- **Funding and brokerage:** Funding for secretariat support has provided the essential backbone infrastructure for the Alliance, including logistics and record-keeping of Alliance activities, development and delivery of communications mechanisms, and membership engagement and maintenance. Brokerage funding for projects has been valuable in accessing external expertise and the flexibility needed to advance projects effectively.
- **Inclusion of youth lived experience:** The inclusion of youth lived experience through the YRG provides a contemporary and nuanced perspective on child and youth mental health issues and service system experiences. YRG members are invited to attend forums, and the YRG Coordinator participates on the Alliance Working Group. Hearing directly from young people supports other Alliance members to better understand young people's experiences and to challenge assumptions.

The YRG is genuinely youth-led and inclusive, with processes and structures that support young people with lived experience to participate in different ways and to varying degrees, accommodating their other life commitments and circumstances. YRG members report that the YRG is neurodiverse-friendly and accessible, and that they value the autonomy and flexibility to both respond to service requests and contribute to system improvements.

- **Member participation and engagement:** Progress on shared problems is only possible through the willingness and active participation of members who contribute their time and expertise towards a system-wide improvement. There is a positive and consistent level of engagement in Alliance activities, across sectors. Feedback from Alliance members indicates that the Alliance activities create opportunities for sector-level change and fostering cross-sector connections, in ways that individual organisations would not have capacity to achieve on their own.

## Challenges and Learnings

A key learning from Alliance delivery is that system coordination and collaboration require dedicated support and active leadership: good will is not enough, and coordination will not occur organically. Furthermore, stakeholder time and resources will always be limited, and action on agreed priorities takes time. It is essential to bring stakeholders along the journey to support meaningful change and impact.

A strength of the Alliance is its diverse membership, which includes community-based and government service providers from various sectors, young people with lived experience,

policymakers, and academics. This diversity allows the Alliance to understand and consider a broad range of perspectives. However, these varied experiences also lead to inherent tensions between stakeholder groups at times. To address this, a framing statement was developed to acknowledge this new way of working and encourage members to value and respect others' perspectives and experiences.

**Alliance Framing Statement:** *The Alliance is a new way of working within and across sectors. Members have expressed interest in creating respectful spaces to promote collaboration, connection, and shared responses. As diverse stakeholders, we are unified by wanting to improve mental health outcomes for children and young people in the ACT.*

*Alliance members bring and value different views, experiences, and perspectives. Understanding these different perspectives is important, especially to respond effectively to the complexity around child and youth mental health issues and system responses. Members are invited to participate in conversations that are open and complex, while also being mindful of each other's lived and professional experiences.*

Over the first 18 months of the Alliance, the lead agencies have sought to learn from and act upon feedback from members to develop shared spaces where participants feel comfortable to share their views.

## 6. Next Steps for the Alliance

In 2025, the Alliance will continue to build upon this foundation by progressing ongoing working group projects, strengthening the community of practice, and creating cross-sector opportunities for members to connect. Through continuous learning and improvement, the lead agencies will seek to ensure that the Alliance continues to use its resources effectively. Current funding for the Alliance is due to end on 30 June 2025.

External initiatives that the Alliance is likely to be involved with include commissioning of the mental health sector, delivery of the Youth at Risk trauma-informed practice training, delivery of the child and youth adaptation of the Initial Assessment and Referral Tool, transition processes from CAMHS for young people turning 18, and development of the *ACT Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy*.

Recent [research](#) (McGorry, 2024) on the impact of global megatrends upon child and youth mental health underscores the need to maintain a focus on supporting child and youth wellbeing and improving service systems. Through its shared ownership and cross-sector engagement, the Alliance provides a valuable mechanism for stakeholders to collaborate and engage in collective problem-solving around this issue.

## **Appendix A. Alliance Membership – December 2024**

- ACT Community Services Directorate (Strategic Policy, CYF, DFSVO, Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, Office for Disability)
- ACT Education Directorate
- ACT Health (Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Division, Health Promotion, Youth at Risk Project)
- ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
- A Gender Agenda
- Anglicare (CYCLOPS & Junction)
- ANU Centre for Mental Health Research
- Association of Independent Schools ACT
- Australian Childhood Foundation
- Barnardos
- CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Canberra Health Services (Early Family Support Service, School Health Nurse Program, MHJHDS)
- Canberra Youth Theatre
- Capital Health Network
- Capital Region Community Services
- Carers ACT (Mental Health Carers Voice)
- Conflict Resolution Service
- Directions Health
- Families ACT
- Fearless Women
- Feros Care
- Galilee School
- Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Cooperation
- Grand Pacific Health (headspace Canberra & Tuggeranong)
- headspace Be You
- Karralika
- Kookaburra Kids
- Legal Aid ACT
- Marymead CatholicCare (MindMap, STEPS, Youth & Wellbeing, Stepping Stones, Next Steps, New Horizons)
- Menslink
- Meridian ACT
- Messengers support program
- Mental Health Community Coalition ACT
- Mental Illness Education ACT
- Multicultural Hub Canberra
- National Disability Services
- Nexus Human Services
- Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Orygen
- Public Advocate ACT

- Relationships Australia
- SHFPACT
- Stride (Safe Haven)
- St Vincent de Paul
- Ted Noffs
- The With Friends Initiative
- Think Mental Health (Head to Health Adult)
- Toora Women
- Uniting (headspace early psychosis)
- University of Canberra (Woke DBT Program, Health Research Institute)
- Wellways
- Woden Community Service
- Youth Coalition of the ACT
- Youth Reference Group (YRG)
- YWCA Canberra