
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

ORYGEN SUBMISSION



ABOUT ORYGEN

Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

Orygen conducts clinical research, runs clinical services, supports the professional development of the youth mental health workforce and provides policy advice relating to young people's mental health.

Our current research strengths include: early psychosis, mood disorders, personality disorders, functional recovery, suicide prevention, online interventions, neurobiology, and health economics.

ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

Orygen welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission into the consultation to develop a new International Development Policy outlining the Australian Government's "commitment to work in partnership with our neighbours in the Pacific and SouthSouth-East Asia to address shared challenges and achieve our shared aspirations."

Orygen's submission will focus on the shared challenges and opportunities for the region in supporting young people's mental health and have identified several questions from the terms of reference and scope that are most relevant to respond to.

WHAT KEY TRENDS OR CHALLENGES WILL SHAPE AUSTRALIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN OUR REGION AND GLOBALLY OVER THE NEXT FIVE TO 10 YEARS?

Youth mental health is a significant global issue which has continued to escalate. Large scale surveys internationally have indicated a dramatic rise in the level of psychological distress and depression among young people over the last 10 years (Twenge, J. et al., 2019).

Conservative estimates indicate that more than 13 per cent of young people aged 10-19 globally experience mental ill-health. This equates to 86 million adolescents 15–19 years old and 80 million 10–14 years old living with a mental illness (UNICEF, 2021).

In 75 per cent of cases, mental ill-health will have first onset before the age of 25 years (Kessler, R. et al. 2007), making adolescence and early adulthood a particularly critical period in development where prevention and early intervention for their mental health could change the rest of their lives.

Poor mental health can have a debilitating effect on a person's ability to participate and contribute socially and economically, and the costs of severe mental illness for the individual, their family and community and governments (including through health system costs and lost productivity) is considerable. The World Economic Forum estimated that between 2010 and 2030 mental illness would cost the global economy US\$16 trillion (Bloom, D.E., et al., 2011).

More recent analysis undertaken by UNICEF indicated that the cost of mental health conditions in children aged 0–19 is US\$387.2 billion. Of this, US\$340.2 billion is attributed to mental health

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conditions that include anxiety and depression, and US\$47 billion reflects the loss due to suicide (UNICEF, 2021).

COVID IMPACTS ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Research has indicated that globally young people's mental health worsened significantly during 2020-21 (the prevalence doubled or more in many countries). Young people's (and particularly young women's) mental health was more impacted than other age groups (OECD 2021).

Key drivers for the increased experience of mental ill-health by young people related to the pandemic included: loneliness /social isolation /loss of social connection; financial stress, loss of employment (self or family); academic pressures due to disrupted learning; covid infections among self/family or friend affected, including bereavement; as well as blanket news coverage and exposure to misleading information (OECD 2021).

The decline in youth mental health during the pandemic attracted the attention of many governments, major international non-government agencies and decision makers. In 2022, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called for mental health to be given "the priority it has always been denied" and called on governments to ensure considerations on mental health are central to responses to the pandemic and recovery.

IMPACTS IN THE SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

In 2019, UNICEF reported that across estimated prevalence of mental health conditions among adolescent boys and girls aged 10–19, the South-East Asia and the Pacific region recorded the second highest numbers and fifth highest prevalence (approx. 12.5%) of all regions globally (UNICEF, 2021).

Suicide rates among adolescents aged 15-19 years in the Pacific region are significantly higher than in the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. According to the World Health Organization's 2019 Mortality and Global Health Estimates, adolescent suicide rates in Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia were three times the average rate across the majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region (where data is available). Vanuatu, Samoa and Solomon Islands also reported some of the highest rates in the region (WHO, 2019). Despite the difficulty in attaining reliable data, research with students in the North Pacific a survey in 2009 revealed that 'over one in four respondents said they had attempted suicide in the past 12 months'. (United Nations Children's Fund and Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2011).

Again, COVID19 further disrupted access to mental health supports in the South-East Asia and Pacific region. All surveyed Pacific Island countries and areas reported disruption to one or more of their mental health services since the COVID-19 pandemic began (WHO, 2020).

Mental health remains the key public health issue across the region, particularly for young people, and unless the region can formulate programs and approaches that aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people, the risk is a greater proportion of this population group will be impacted by mental ill-health. Ultimately this will impact upon the development of strong economies across the region as young people's life trajectories toward leading fulfilling and meaningful lives are derailed through psychosocial disability and other tragic consequences.

WHAT RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES DOES THIS PRESENT FOR AUSTRALIA'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE?

Australia is a world leader in mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention, specifically across the age range for those aged 12 to 25 years. This represents a significant opportunity for Australia to shift its focus to utilising its expertise in this space to work with and support countries in the South-East Asia and Pacific region in relation to mental health in young people.

Young people have identified mental health as one of their primary concerns they want their family, community and country respond to (Orygen and World Economic Forum, 2020). Critical to this is young people's willingness to engage in advocacy efforts and to be the ones to lead change in this area and support efforts locally to develop real world solutions that will impact on local communities.

Orygen's work in the South-East Asia and Pacific region to date indicates a high level of interest by young people, the NGO sector and some governments to focus on how to put mental health firmly on the regions agenda and learn from one another the best approaches to support young people. For example, the Pacific Youth Development Forum Strategy for 2014–2023 comprises four priority outcome areas that were informed by young people. Priority two is that young people's health status is improved, with a particular focus on improving young people's mental health and wellbeing and addressing the perceived neglect on this issue.

There is a risk in Australia attempting to transplant youth mental health service approaches and models that have been designed or researched here into the diverse regional and cultural context of the region. Key to minimising this risk is working to key principles or practices which we know have evidence behind them (such as those described in the Orygen and WEF Global Youth Mental Health Framework) but adapting these to different resource settings and cultural contexts. To do this, it is critical that whatever program or project is being developed that young people are at the centre of the decision-making process. They are experts in their own mental health and knows what works and where things fail.

This is also key to ensuring the sustainability of any program that is designed to work locally in a country or community within the region. Young people have been at the forefront of ensuring mental health is on the global agenda even where there may be a lack of interest from their own governments. They have a vested interest in ensuring that whatever program they invest their time and energy into will need to be sustainable in the long term.

Australia's policy direction in international development needs to engage and empower young people from across the region and pay particular attention to those areas that young people continually identify that are important to them and where they feel their voices are not being heard. This includes issues such as climate change, mental health and sustainability. While these may not necessarily be the top priorities of governments in the region, the opportunity exists for Australia to facilitate awareness and negotiate how best to take collective action on this significant global challenge of mental ill-health among young people.

HOW CAN AUSTRALIA BEST UTILISE ITS NATIONAL STRENGTHS TO ENHANCE THE IMPACT OF OUR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND ADDRESS MULTIDIMENSIONAL VULNERABILITIES?

Youth mental health research and service delivery expertise in Australia is a significant national strength that could be mobilised in supporting the development program. There is an opportunity to share learning and development on how we can connect regional partners and existing architecture to best support young people across the South-East Asia and Pacific region to experience good wellbeing, positive mental health and thrive in their local, regional and global communities.

Orygen is one example of Australia's youth mental health expertise, which was recognised by the World Economic Forum. In 2019, Orygen was provided the status of a tier two partner for the Forum's Platform on Shaping the Future of Health and Healthcare. The Orygen and World Economic Forum global youth mental health project involved widespread consultation with clinical academics, service providers, policy makers and young people from over 40 different countries in different resource and cultural settings. The project produced:

- A Global Framework for Youth Mental Health Care to support communities, regions and countries around the world to develop and deliver effective youth mental health services and supports (focus of the launch).
- An investment framework to support funders access the economic evidence for early intervention and prevention.
- An advocacy toolkit to support young people, families and their local communities to make youth mental health a priority for leaders, funders and policy makers.

The project further elevated the profile of Australia's world leading youth mental health expertise among key private and public stakeholders globally, with the work promoted at events during the United Nations General Assembly 2019 and Davos 2020.

Orygen's Global team have continued to progress work including through delivering an Advocacy Fellowship program for young people from around the globe to become advocates in their country for the development of appropriate youth mental health programs and supports. The Fellowship has had a total of 30 Global Fellows complete the program and is now in its 3rd cohort of 15 young people from the ASEAN region which has been supported through DFAT.

The team is also collaborating with key global organisation such as UNICEF, WHO and United for Global Mental Health to create opportunities for youth mental health including in Serbia, South Africa, Kenya, across ASEAN member states and in the Pacific region (through the development of a mental health resource for primary and secondary school teachers to better support them in managing mental health concerns in young people and how best to support family members).

In the past 12 months Orygen has facilitated two regional forums for ASEAN member states on mental health and specifically youth mental health. Through these events we have learnt of the need to provide opportunities for regional partners including young people, NGOs and government departments, to collaborate and learn from one another. The capacity to curate different opportunities for these groups to share and learn from one another has been significant and Australia has a unique opportunity to continue to lead the curation of more forums like this across the region, to connect international partners with Australia and existing regional architecture and generate collective action on this significant global challenge impacting this region.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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