

# evaluation of headspace centre services

## our approach

headspace has a strong focus on continuous quality improvement and is committed to ensuring that its services and programs are underpinned by the best quality evidence. Evaluation of these services enables headspace to better understand young people's needs and determine appropriate ways to address them through evidence-informed practice, innovative interventions and service improvement and reform.



The evaluation of headspace centres is an important part of headspace's approach to outcome measurement and service improvement, and a critical lever for demonstrating the impact of headspace.



Of particular interest is:

- understanding what works, what doesn't and why
- determining effectiveness of headspace programs in achieving outcomes for young people
- guiding continuous improvement of headspace programs to provide the best service that we can to young people
- demonstrating and reporting on program delivery and effectiveness to program funders to meet our reporting requirements and to inform future decision making
- contributing to the current evidence about early intervention in the youth mental health field.

The evaluation of headspace centres is an important part of headspace's approach to outcome measurement and service improvement, and a critical lever for demonstrating the impact of headspace. Given the complex nature of how headspace centres operate, the diversity of the communities that they support and the holistic nature of that support, it is important that headspace presents a clear framework guiding their evaluation. Furthermore, headspace National supports external evaluations of headspace centres, and our evaluation frameworks and program logics are a useful resource to help inform and frame these external evaluations.

This document provides an overview of headspace's approach to evaluation of headspace centre services, including:

- ethical and culturally responsive evaluation
- simplified outcomes hierarchy
- key outcome areas
- enablers to access, engagement and impact.

## ethical and culturally responsive evaluation

**One of the challenges for the evaluation of headspace centre services is in better understanding the experience of, and outcomes for, the diverse range of young people and families who access and engage with headspace centres. Evaluations of headspace centre services should explore these differences and build in mechanisms to ensure that design, methodologies, data collection and measurement are culturally informed and relevant to priority groups. Evaluations should also provide meaningful opportunities for involvement of young people and their families.**

### Diversity of young people and their lived experience

Young people and their families who receive services at headspace centres are an immensely heterogeneous population, and it is important that any evaluation activity sheds light on this diversity as well as exploring whether there are different pathways, outcomes and experiences for different groups. Importantly, it may be that different outcomes are experienced by young people from different backgrounds, and that success for one young person may not look the same as success for another. Any evaluation of headspace centre services must consider the impact of diverse demographic, structural, situational and clinical presentation factors.

There may also be different perspectives on what constitutes positive mental health, and for some young people and their communities (particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people) more holistic and culturally specific language and measures may be more appropriate. For example, indicators of improved outcomes may be more appropriately framed in social and emotional wellbeing concepts, or in terms of connection to culture and family.

### Taking an ethical and culturally informed approach to evaluation and measurement

Data collection methodologies should be scrutinised to ensure that they are safe and respectful, and there should be an emphasis on knowledge translation and communication of findings to priority communities. In general, where relevant and appropriate, evaluation projects should disaggregate by gender, cultural background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, and LGBTIQ+ status to explore trends for young people and families from different backgrounds. Furthermore, all evaluation should be high quality and adhere to the highest ethical standards.

### Youth, and family and friends participation

headspace is informed by the experiences and needs of young people and their families and friends, and their participation continues to be fundamental to our services and their evaluation. The development of our approach for evaluating headspace centres was informed by young people (via a community survey and consultation with headspace's national youth reference group, hYNRG). Additionally, through all our evaluation activities we seek to provide meaningful opportunities for involvement of young people and their families, and ensure findings and insights are made widely accessible.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this evaluation overview, headspace centres include all headspace centre services including centres, satellites and outposts, but not broader programs and services such as eheadspace.



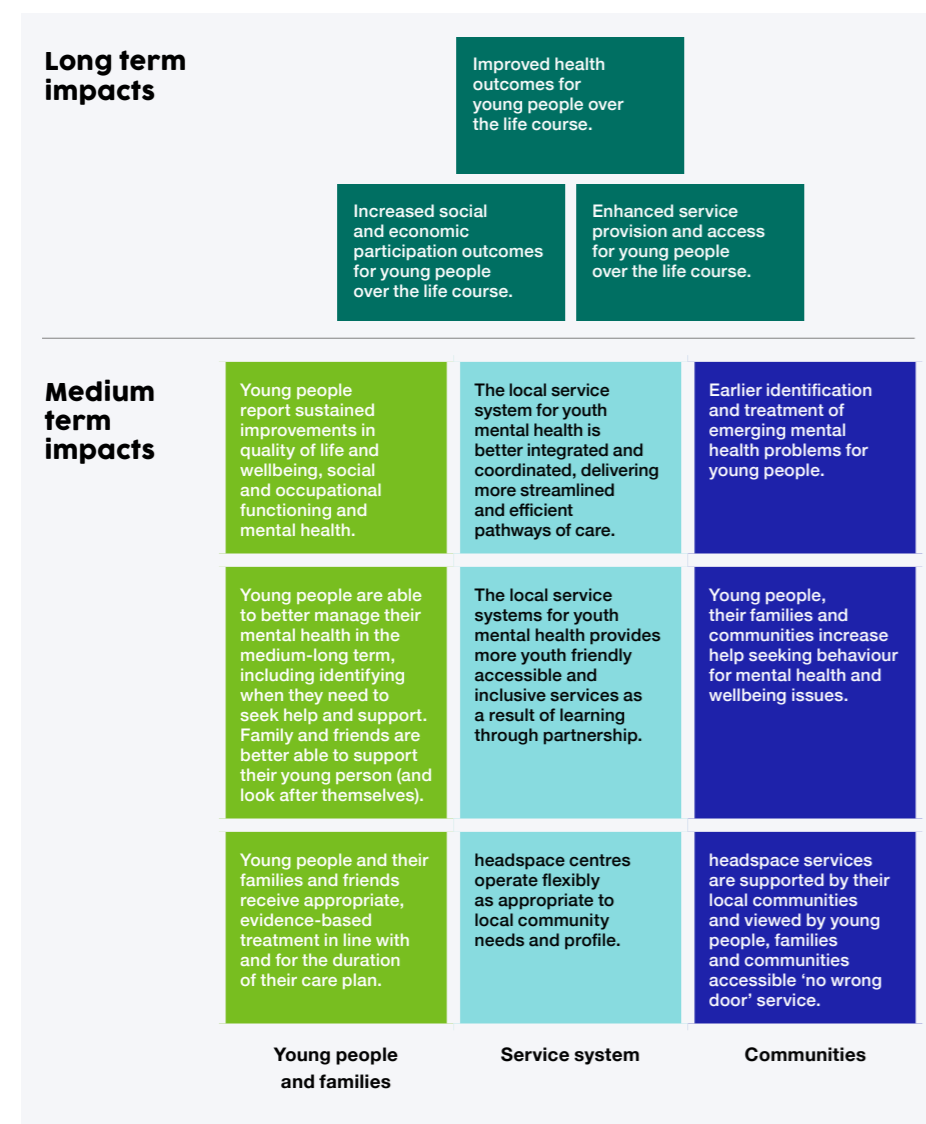
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## simplified outcomes hierarchy

The program logic underpinning headspace centres is a complex and evolving framework that articulates the expected sequencing of process measures (activities and outputs),

short-term outcomes, medium-term outcomes and long-term outcomes. Figure 1 provides a simplified summary of the medium and long term outcomes that headspace centres are working towards.

**Figure 1: headspace centre services simplified outcomes hierarchy**



## key outcome areas

In evaluating headspace centre services, it is important to understand the broad range of holistic (individual, community and system level) outcomes. This framework proposes that the

four key outcome areas presented in Figure 2 capture the broad range of impacts that headspace centres deliver, alongside the individual-level outcomes of clinical interventions.

**Figure 2: Key outcome areas for headspace centres**

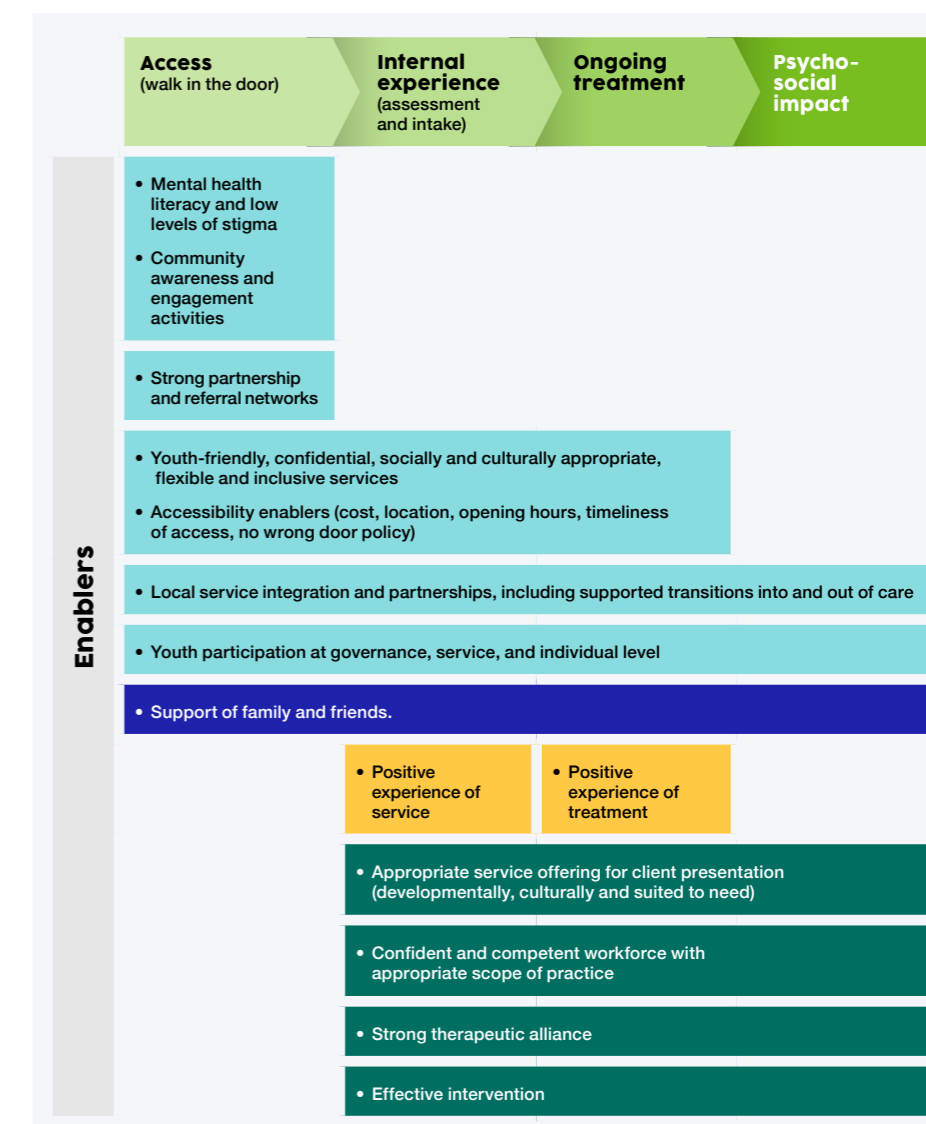


## enablers to access, engagement and impact

Figure 3 articulates a proposed model of potential enablers which contribute to improving the engagement and impacts for young people accessing headspace centre services. Articulating this pathway through the system and

the enablers at each point highlights a number of potential barriers to achieving psycho-social impacts (and so highlights (or demonstrates/emphasises) the importance of measuring these enablers and barriers.

**Figure 3: Potential enablers to access, engagement and impact**



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## comprehensive and nationally consistent data

headspace is committed to obtaining quality data across all of its programs for service monitoring, reporting and evaluation. headspace centre services routinely collect information from service users and the staff providing those services through a comprehensive and nationally consistent minimum dataset. In order to guide service innovation and improvement, the minimum dataset is framed around answering the following questions:

- **How?** How do young people hear about headspace; who influences them and their pathways to headspace?
- **Who?** Who are the young people coming to headspace, including demographic and clinical characteristics?
- **Why?** Why are young people coming to headspace; what are their presenting issues and needs?
- **What?** What do young people receive and from who (provider, service type, duration, and funding stream); and what outcomes do they achieve?

This enables our evaluation, monitoring and reporting, and quality improvement processes to be informed by holistic and clinically relevant indicators that help to provide insight into the complexity of headspace's clients and the operating environment of headspace centres.

## work-planning and future projects

Building on the conceptual approach presented in this document and taking into account evolving organisational priorities, in the coming years headspace will endeavour to evaluate and better understand:

- the impact of COVID on young people and the experiences of staff and clients accessing telehealth
- the accessibility of headspace centres for a diverse range of young people, families and friends (such as young people from different demographic groups and clinical presentations)
- holistic outcomes for different groups of young people, including young people from diverse backgrounds and with different clinical presentations
- the extent headspace centres are accessible to, and appropriate for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- factors that are associated with higher levels of service engagement or continuation
- care pathways for groups of young people with different presenting profiles
- the extent to which headspace centres improve the coordination and integration of the local service system.

Reports on publicly available evaluations and related projects will continue to be made available at [headspace.org.au/about-us/evaluation-research-reports/](https://headspace.org.au/about-us/evaluation-research-reports/).

If you have any questions about headspace evaluation activities please contact [evaluation@headspace.org.au](mailto:evaluation@headspace.org.au)



headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.



headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and emerging and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.

