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Gaps in mental health services mean many people continue to rely on less suitable and higher cost care

The Auditor General today presented to Parliament the *Access to State-Managed Adult Mental Health Services* audit report that assessed whether people can access adult State-managed mental health services efficiently and effectively.

The report concludes there has been limited progress against the Mental Health Commission's *Better Choices. Better Lives: Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025* (the plan).

Released in 2015 the plan identified an urgent need to expand community mental health services and rely less on costly hospital beds. It is a soundly devised plan, developed with extensive consultation and strong support from consumers and care providers.

However, slow progress in implementation and a lack of agreed funding means the system continues to deliver mental health services inefficiently and ineffectively and relies on ad-hoc investment.

The audit also identified a lack of clarity around who is responsible for managing mental health care, which has worked against effective coordination between the Mental Health Commission and the Department of Health.

Western Australia's Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer said these factors have led to ongoing gaps in mental health services which means people continue to rely on acute, higher cost and often less suitable care.

'An efficient and effective State-funded mental health care system should help people stay in the least intensive care setting required to manage their condition, while providing access to more intensive care when needed,' Ms Spencer said.

The Commission and Department currently focus on the volume of services delivered and to some extent lived experience to understand how people use mental health services. This does not identify the patterns of people accessing care.

Through unique data analysis techniques, applied for the first time in the WA State Health sector, the audit looked at how people move through the WA mental health system.

The audit found that between 2013 and 2017, 4.8 million mental health care events were delivered to more than 212,000 people. The audit highlighted that of the 212,000 people, just 10% used 90% of the total State-managed mental health hospital care and almost 50% of emergency and community treatment services.



Without examining people's pathways in combination with their existing information, the State cannot develop, prioritise and cost appropriate solutions to provide mental health care efficiently for key groups of vulnerable people.

Ms Spencer said the entities should examine and analyse people's pathways across all mental health services to understand the capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of care options currently provided.

'Doing so, while incorporating lived experience and activity data, would allow them to better target service reform,' she said.

The hard work of dedicated clinicians, care-givers and front-line administrators is hindered by the lack of suitable and available care settings in this already challenging sector.

The Commission and Department should also develop an implementation and funding plan to achieve the optimal service mix outlined in the Better Choices. Better Lives plan.

You can read today's report at www.audit.wa.gov.au.

ENDS