

---

## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

# Improving the physical health of people living with mental illness: Equally Well in Australia.

2nd Asia Pacific Conference on Integrated Care, Melbourne, 11-13 November 2019

Kirsty Barnes, Russell Roberts<sup>3</sup>, Caroline Johnson<sup>4</sup>, Mal Hopwood<sup>2,4,5</sup>, Dave Peters<sup>5,6</sup>

1: Queensland Health, Australia;

2: RANZCP, Australia;

3: Charles Sturt University, Australia;

4: University of Melbourne, Australia;

5: Equally Well, Australia;

6: NEAMI National, Australia

---

**Introduction:** People living with mental illness die 20 years prematurely<sup>1</sup> and much of this early death is attributed to cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer.<sup>2</sup> Eighty percent of people with mental illness also have a chronic physical health condition<sup>3</sup> and many of these illness are completely avoidable.<sup>4</sup>

**Short description of practice change implemented:** This paper describes a national model of implementation to support quality physical health care for people living with mental illness. It seeks to support an integrated approach across professions and services, and also support individual clinicians to take a holistic approach to care.

**Aim and theory of change:** To support local, regional, state and national action and innovation, Equally Well has adapted constellation model of collective impact to influence practice.<sup>5</sup> across the Australian health and human services system. This approach is underpinned by a social and digital media strategy that builds awareness, provides resources and facilitates collaboration.

**Targeted population and stakeholders:** Ninety key organisations, including all Australian governments, 15 professional colleges, and key consumer and advocacy organisations have committed to make implementing Equally Well a priority. Equally Well also specifically supports clinicians, people living with mental illness and their carers.<sup>6</sup>

**Timeline:** Equally Well commenced in 2015 with a program of extensive stakeholder consultation.<sup>7</sup> The project has a 10 year horizon, at which time the next steps will be considered.

**Highlights:** A recent national audit of activity revealed there are now hundreds of local services innovating and introducing new partnerships and processes to implement Equally Well. Examples include: 19 new, coordinated projects in one state to improve the physical health of older people living with mental illness, a GP network in another state running workshops to plan actions, and Victoria developing their own Equally Well implementation strategy.

**Comments on sustainability:** Embedding action within a multitude of committed partners helps make the program sustainable and not reliant on a central agency or policy. In addition, including

the implementation of Equally Well as an action of The Fifth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, also supports sustainability.

**Comments on transferability:** With a wide ranging strategy that seeks to influence state and national policy, but also individual clinicians, consumers means this program is transferable to other policy areas.

**Conclusions:**

- A collective action approach appears to be an effective way to implement national policy across a complex health system.

- With organisations at different stages of organisational readiness, a collective impact approach means lessons learned and resources can be shared as organisations mature and change.

**Discussions:** The presentation will discuss the challenges associated with sectors that have been hard to engage.

It will also discuss the role of social media and the importance of collective ownership of the movement and facilitating vibrant, respectful dialogue between clinicians, consumers and carers.

**Lessons learned:** In a human services environment with so many competing demands, the capacity to maintain continuous communication, link partners, share success and facilitate collaboration is critical.