



MENTAL HEALTH INNOVATION FUND



Mental Health Innovation Fund

New Zealanders have made good progress breaking down the stigma around asking for help with mental health. But when people do ask for help, they often find a mental health system that is too hard to access; it is too slow, too bureaucratic, and not innovative enough to deal with growing demand.

The result has been a significant and increasing level of unmet need, with the number of people reporting they are unable to get the professional help they need increasing by 80 per cent compared to when Labour took office five years ago.¹

Despite big spending promises, Labour has not delivered the improvement in mental health services and outcomes New Zealanders urgently need, with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission finding improvements in services had not materialised despite \$1.9 billion in funding announced in 2019.²

One reason for the lack of material progress on mental health is that Labour, as with so many other areas, is trying to run everything from Wellington. This inevitably results in slow decision-making, low levels of innovation, and resources being tied up in unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape while community organisations who are making a difference on the ground miss out.

At the same time, the Government's disruptive restructure of the health system is diverting much needed time, effort, and resources away from where the need is greatest – on the frontlines and in our communities.

National says we need to move faster and with far greater urgency in mental health. This means accepting and embracing the fact that Government does not have all the solutions. There are amazing organisations out there in our communities working tirelessly to improve mental health outcomes; offering better services at lower cost than anything the Government has been able to deliver over the last five years.

The NGO sector can achieve this by embracing technology, developing innovative operating models, or simply by understanding their communities better than health bureaucrats in Wellington. But they could be doing so much more. National wants to back these community organisations to keep innovating and keep delivering better mental health outcomes for more New Zealanders.

National will do this through the Mental Health Innovation Fund, which will see up to \$20 million in matching funds distributed to community mental health organisations who can demonstrate they are delivering strong results for Kiwis in need with the money they are already investing.

Rather than running everything through Wellington, the Mental Health Innovation Fund will support innovative community providers like Mike King's Gumboot Friday to scale up their already successful operations so they can reach more Kiwis in need.

To apply for co-investment funding from the Mental Health Innovation Fund, NGO's will need to demonstrate they can:

1. Increase access to mental health and addiction support
2. Protect public specialist mental health services by reducing demand
3. Develop capacity in the mental health workforce
4. Use technology to drive productivity
5. Deliver scalable solutions for unmet need
6. Evidence positive social return on investment

¹ New Zealand Health Survey 2021-22, Ministry of Health

² Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Press Release, 22 March 2022

Why we need a new approach

According to the New Zealand Health Survey from the Ministry of Health, unmet need for professional mental health support increased between 2017 and 2022:

- 8.8 per cent of adults reported an unmet need for professional help for their emotions, stress, mental health, or substance use in 2022, up from 4.9 per cent in 2017.
- Young adults reported the highest rates of unmet need for professional help, with 16.2 cent at 15–24 years and 15.6 per cent at 25–34 years.
- Children experiencing unmet need for professional help also increased (according to their parents), rising from 4.5 per cent in 2017 to 6.2 per cent in 2022.

With economic conditions continuing to deteriorate, there is growing concern among mental health professionals that things are only going to get worse, as financial pressures build on Kiwi families.

According to the latest Ipsos Mental Health Survey, one in two New Zealanders reported having felt severely stressed and/or depressed in the past year, with concern about personal finances taking over as the most impactful factor affecting New Zealanders' mental wellbeing.

“The cost of living crisis is adding pressure into the lives of New Zealanders every day. From the Ipsos Issues Monitor we know that inflation / cost of living is the number one issue our country is facing. This survey shows it’s not only taking a toll on our wallets, but also on our mental health. Finances now have the biggest effect on our mental wellbeing.”

– Amanda Dudding, Ipsos New Zealand³

Community organisations must be part of the solution

While the Government has struggled to deliver improvements in mental health outcomes, charitable community organisations like Mike King’s Gumboot Friday and the construction sector’s MATES in Construction are getting on with delivering mental health services to Kiwis in need. They are doing this largely through charitable donations and fundraising, with limited support from the Government.

But independent analysis shows that these groups are delivering significant benefits for the money they invest, particularly for Kiwis suffering with mild to moderate mental health issues.

For example, a recent analysis of Gumboot Friday’s operations found that for every dollar they receive they generate an average of \$5.70 of social value by delivering free counselling to Kiwis aged 5-24 through:

- Improved mental health
- Increased academic achievement
- Reduced risky behaviour
- Reduced addiction
- Reduced offending

³ https://www.ipsos.com/en-nz/Mental_Health_2022

National believes that rather than trying to run everything from Wellington and failing to deliver material improvements in outcomes for \$1.9 billion, the Government should be far more innovative and flexible in its approach to delivering mental health services. National will identify what works and deliver the funding to scale it up.

National's Mental Health Innovation Fund

National will power up charitable community organisations who are delivering positive outcomes for New Zealanders where the Government is failing.

The Mental Health Innovation Fund will see up to \$20 million in matching funds distributed to community mental health organisations who can demonstrate they are delivering strong results for Kiwis in need with the money they are already investing.

Rather than trying to run everything from Wellington, the Mental Health Innovation Fund will deliver more resources to the frontline by scaling up NGOs and community providers who are delivering better mental health outcomes, faster and more efficiently than the Government.

The Mental Health Innovation Fund will operate on a matched funding basis, with existing investment from community organisations like Gumboot Friday matched by the Government up to an agreed funding cap. Matched funds will only be used for service delivery, not overheads or administration costs.

For example, where Gumboot Friday funds counselling sessions at an average session cost of around \$145, the Mental Health Innovation Fund could provide matching funds up to an agreed total which would allow Gumboot Friday to roughly double the number of sessions they are purchasing. This would have a huge impact on the organisation's ability to deliver mental health support to more young New Zealanders in need.

Based on the cost per session that an organisation like Gumboot Friday achieves, National's \$20 million investment could deliver the equivalent of more than 130,000 additional free counselling sessions from the NGO sector over four years.

It is anticipated that not all funding will go towards NGOs who deliver one-on-one counselling, with funding also available for activities such as the suicide prevention programmes run by MATES in Construction or any other mental health programme provided they can demonstrate they are delivering outcomes.

The Mental Health Innovation Fund will be open to any charitable community organisation offering mental health support, with funding primarily allocated based on demonstrated social return on investment.

Funding criteria

To apply for co-investment funding from the Mental Health Innovation Fund, NGOs will need to demonstrate they can:

1. Increase access to mental health and addiction support

The 2017 Mental Health inquiry recommended an indicative target of increasing access to mental health and addiction support from 3.7 per cent of the population to the 20 per cent who experience mental health and addiction issues each year.⁴ As stigma reduces many more people are asking for help but when they do, quite often timely support is not there.

2. Protect public specialist mental health services by reducing demand

Publicly funded specialist mental health and addiction services are overwhelmed. Often, people are not able to access support, or when they do, they are put on long waitlists. Shifting demand for those in need of mild to moderate support to the NGO sector will allow capacity in specialist services to be freed up for those who need timely specialist support.

3. Develop capacity in the mental health workforce

The biggest barrier to timely mental health and addiction support is the mental health workforce crisis. To increase access to mental health support there is a need to activate and grow the NGO mental health workforce.

4. Use technology to drive productivity

Technology allows for more responsive services than what has been the traditional mental health service model. Technology can provide more choice and faster engagement between the individual and mental health practitioner at a time and place more suitable for both. Younger people are often more comfortable using technology-based solutions.

5. Deliver scalable solutions for unmet need

The fund will seek to co-invest with innovative NGOs who have the ability to scale up to deliver mental health solutions that target unmet need. Co-investment will allow NGOs to scale up and provide a greater volume of sustainable mental health support to reduce unmet demand.

6. Evidence positive social return on investment

Calculating a return on investment allows funders and providers to evidence the effectiveness of a service in delivering the outcomes that it aims to achieve. In return for increased funding, National would require community providers to embrace robust assessment and evaluation of their offerings to drive efficiency and deliver the best outcomes from limited resources.

⁴ He Ara Oranga: Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, p. 103

CASE STUDY – GUMBOOT FRIDAY

Through Gumboot Friday, I AM HOPE supports young people aged 5-24 to access mental health support. Gumboot Friday's counselling platform allows young people to have access to free sessions with a qualified mental health practitioner of their choice.

Gumboot Friday offers an alternative pathway to mental health support than the long wait times of public mental health services. Young people can access the Gumboot Friday counselling platform themselves or be referred.

A young person can expect a reply from their practitioner of choice within 48 hours and counselling typically begins within two weeks. Gumboot Friday sponsors the first two sessions which are either in person or online sessions. If more support is required Gumboot Friday sponsors up to a maximum of six sessions.

All Gumboot Friday practitioners are registered and are required to have a current annual practising certificate and are police vetted.

A Social Impact Assessment by ImpactLab found every dollar invested in I AM HOPE delivers \$5.70 of measurable good to New Zealand.

In the year to September 2022, Gumboot Friday delivered more than 19,000 free counselling sessions that helped over 12,000 young people. The total cost of fees paid to Gumboot Friday counsellors was \$2.46 million. Under National, Gumboot Friday would be in a position to roughly double the number of free counselling sessions they deliver for that same \$2.46 million.⁵

Funding

National will make an initial investment into the Mental Health Innovation Fund of \$20 million over four years. This will allow community providers to scale up over time while maintaining the strong social return on investment they are already achieving.

National will consider additional investments if the Mental Health Innovation Fund is oversubscribed, and recipients are able to scale up while continuing to deliver strong outcomes for Kiwis in need.

National has made a commitment to increase Health funding in line with inflation. The funding for the Mental Health Innovation Fund will come from this increase.

⁵ <https://www.gumbootfriday.org.nz/resources>