



ACT Budget Submission 2023-24

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mieact

A safe space for
mental health education

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ABOUT MIEACT

Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) is a not-for-profit organisation working to reduce stigma and increase literacy around mental health in the Canberra community.

In any one year, 20 per cent of Australians aged 16-85 will experience a mental illness.¹ Young people have the highest prevalence of mental illness than any other age group in Australia, with recent data showing around one in five young Australians met the criteria for a probable serious mental illness.²

As the primary local mental health and well-being education provider in the ACT, MIEACT provides mental health education for primary and secondary schools, workplaces and community groups across Canberra and the surrounding region.

For more than two decades, MIEACT has delivered evidence-informed programs. Through partnering with people with lived experience of mental illness, we share stories that increase mental health literacy, promote early intervention, reduce stigma, and emphasise recovery across the community.

¹ The Black Dog Institute, 2020: *Facts and figures about mental health*. Accessed online on 19 January 2023 via: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1-facts_figures.pdf>

² Ibid.

INTRODUCTION

MIEACT welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission for the 2023-24 ACT Budget Consultation.

MIEACT's submission proposes the ACT Budget support continued funding of \$1.5m over three years to extend the delivery of the Youth Aware of Mental Health program in the ACT to support suicide prevention, sustain a decline in depression severity, and increase help-seeking intentions post-Covid.

Since 2020, Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) has been the nominated provider for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) for 'Youth Aware of Mental Health' (YAM) – an evidence-based mental health program delivered to young people in a classroom setting. This program provides young people with a safe and non-judgemental space to explore mental health topics such as stress, crises, depression, knowledge of suicide warning signs, and safe and effective help-seeking strategies.

YAM is delivered by MIEACT to secondary schools in partnership with the ACT Health Directorate. Currently, funding for YAM in the ACT will cease at the end of 2023.

The increase in school concern for youth mental health outcomes post-Covid is clearly illustrated by MIEACT experiencing its highest-ever recorded level of demand across our high school programs in 2023, with booking requests from schools exceeding our delivery capacity by 100% this year.

YOUTH AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM (YAM)

YAM is a school-based program for young people aged 13 –17, in which they learn about and explore the topic of mental health where students actively engage with important mental health themes through role-play and student-led discussions.³

In Australia, research examining YAM delivery to Year 9 students in New South Wales found the program led to a decline in depression severity, and help seeking intentions increased,⁴ and observed that, “the YAM program is a promising preventive intervention for Australian schools, particularly for reducing suicidal ideation, depression, and increasing help-seeking”.⁵

More broadly, YAM has been evaluated in the EU-wide Randomized Controlled Trial of more than 11,000 participants. The results found YAM effective in reducing new cases of suicide attempts and severe suicidal ideation by approximately 50 per cent of participants. New cases of depression were reduced by approximately 30 per cent in the youth participating in YAM.⁶ Similar results have been reported in the United States.

In the ACT, YAM has been delivered by MIEACT to Year 9 students across the region since 2020

³ Youth Aware of Mental Health, *About Yam*, viewed 19 January 2023, accessed via: < <http://www.y-a-m.org/>>

⁴ International Journal of Mental Health Systems 2021: *The Youth Aware of Mental Health program in Australian Secondary Schools: 3- and 6-month outcomes*, accessed online via: [The Youth Aware of Mental Health program in Australian Secondary Schools: 3- and 6-month outcomes | International Journal of Mental Health Systems | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-021-00400-0)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

and is free for students to attend. Currently, funding for YAM will cease at the end of 2023.

MIEACT'S DELIVERY OF YAM IN THE ACT

Since 2020, MIEACT has been the nominated provider of YAM in the ACT, working in close partnership with the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Division. This program is delivered in classrooms by a trained YAM Instructor with support from a YAM Helper, who provide young people with a safe and non-judgemental space to explore mental health topics.

Throughout the duration of MIEACT's current delivery of the YAM program to ACT schools (Term 1 2020 – end of Term 1 2023, inclusive), 20 different ACT schools have participated in the program out of 38 secondary schools. In total, 35 cohorts of students, 159 classes, and approximately 6,107 students from these schools have taken part in the YAM program.

MIEACT believes that continuation of the program is justified not only by the performance of the program to date but also by:

1. Youth mental Health trends and COVID-19
2. Youth mental health costs
3. The program being closely align to ACT Wellbeing Framework 'Health' domain

Youth mental health trends and COVID-19

The increase in school concern for youth mental health outcomes post-Covid is clearly illustrated by MIEACT experiencing its highest-ever recorded level of demand for our high school programs in 2023, with booking requests from schools exceeding our delivery capacity by 100% this year. Young people have the highest prevalence of mental illness than any other age group in Australia, with recent data showing around ***one in five young Australians met the criteria for a probable serious mental illness.***⁷

Within the ACT, a 2019 ACT Government Public inquiry into the social and economic benefits of improving mental health in the region found:

- ***almost 50 per cent of hospitalisations due to self-harm in 2015-16 were young Canberrans aged 10-24 years¹; and that***
- ***younger Canberrans (18-24 years) are the most likely cohort to experience psychological distress.¹***

Current trends indicate that these figures will increase due to the disruption and wellbeing impact of Covid.

We know that many life trajectories are set in place during adolescence and young adulthood⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023, *Australia's Youth: Mental illness*, viewed 19 January 2023, accessed via: <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/mental-illness>.

and that poor mental health can impact the potential for a young person to live a fulfilling and productive life.⁹ In 2017–18, an estimated 339,000 young Australians aged 18–24 (15 per cent) experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress.¹⁰ As recently as 2019, there were 461 deaths by suicide among young people aged 15–24 in Australia.¹¹

One of the major challenges facing governments and the community is the fallout from COVID-19. Although we will not know the true lasting mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's young people for years to come, early reports indicate that youth mental health has worsened in Australia since COVID-19.¹²

According to a recent report released by headspace, 74 per cent of young people surveyed reported that their mental health had worsened since the COVID-19 outbreak, and 86 per cent reported a negative impact on their mood, wellbeing or sleeping.¹³

In 2023, MIEACT has experienced unprecedented demand across our high-school programs which we believe is being driven by these experiences of increased mental ill health among students, and a notable shift and increase in school dedication and concern for youth mental health outcomes.

Youth mental health costs

According to a study undertaken by the Orygen Institute, in 2009 just over one million Australians aged 12-25 with a lifetime diagnosis of a mental illness experienced symptoms within the last 12 months (478,000 males and 526,000 females).¹⁴

The same study flagged Australia faced substantial costs arising from mental illness in young people. In 2009, the financial cost of mental illness in people aged 12-25 was \$10.6 billion. Of this:

- \$7.5 billion (70.5 per cent) was productivity lost due to lower employment, absenteeism, and premature death of young people with mental illness
- \$1.6 billion (15.5 per cent) was the deadweight loss (DWL) from transfers including welfare payments and taxation forgone
- \$1.4 billion (13.4 per cent) was direct health system expenditure
- \$65.5 million (0.6 per cent) was other indirect costs comprising informal carer costs and the bring-forward of funeral costs.
- Additionally, the value of the lost wellbeing (disability and premature death) was a further \$20.5 billion. This amounts to a financial cost of \$10,544 per person with mental illness aged 12-25 per year. Including the value of lost wellbeing, the cost is estimated as \$31,014 per person per year.¹⁵

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation, 2020, *Coping with COVID: the mental health impact on young people accessing headspace services*. Accessed online 19 January 2023, <<https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/COVID-Client-Impact-Report-FINAL-11-8-20.pdf>>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Centre of Excellence, Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, Parkville, Victoria: *The economic impact of youth mental illness and the cost effectiveness of early intervention*. Viewed 19 January 2023, accessed via: <[Microsoft Word - Final Cost YMH_rpts_August 11.docx \(orygen.org.au\)](#)>

¹⁵ Ibid.

MIEACT'S 3-YEAR YAM FUNDING PROPOSAL

MIEACT is seeking \$1.5m* across three years to extend and expand its delivery of the YAM program into ACT schools. The main elements of those costs are represented in the following table.

Activity	TOTAL ANNUAL COST (\$AUD)	TOTAL COST FOR THREE YEARS (\$AUD)
Administration & Overhead Fees - Grants	53544	160631
Cleaning	1632	4896
Electricity & Security	1377	4130
Graphic Design & Printing	1657	4970
Insurance - Other	1706	5117
IT Expenses	1584	4753
Long Service Leave	5639	16918
Minor Catering & Events	2256	6768
Office Expenses	1005	3016
Photocopying	1099	3298
Publications/Resources	1899	5698
Rent	8541	25623
Staff Supervision	1915	5745
Staff Training/HR Development	1495	4484
Subscriptions/Memberships	77	232
Superannuation	32159	96476
Telephone/Fax/Internet	1879	5638
Travel/Parking	10631	31892
VE Reimbursement	4433	13298
Venue Hire & Accommodation	257	770
Wages and Salaries	364915	1094745
Worker Compensation Insurance	3608	10823
Total operating expenses	\$495,671	\$1,487,103

*Final figures have been rounded up.

The above cost modelling would enable MIEACT to deliver YAM sessions to approximately 40-45 cohorts of Year 9 students consisting of 180-200 classes in over 20 ACT schools for the period, providing around 7,000+ students with this valuable, proven resource.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

That the ACT Government commits to continued funding of \$1.5 m over three years to extend the delivery of the Youth Aware of Mental Health program in the ACT to support suicide prevention, sustain a decline in depression severity, and increase help-seeking intentions post-Covid.

Since 2020, MIEACT has been the nominated provider for the delivery of YAM to young people across the ACT in close partnership with the ACT Health Directorate. YAM is an evidence-based program which has shown to be effective in reducing mental illness experiences within young people, who we know are the cohort with the highest prevalence of mental illness in Australia.

With recent figures suggesting one in five young Australians met the criteria for a probable serious mental illness, already substantial costs for governments arising from mental illness in young people, and early research indicating that youth wellbeing post-Covid is declining, investing in proven, preventive health measures are a common-sense cost saving measure that have lifechanging and lasting benefits for young people and throughout the community.