



ACT Recovery College

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Purpose of Submission:

A six-month extension to the ACT Recovery College Trial

In this Submission, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT (MHCC ACT) is proposing a six-month extension to the ACT Recovery College Trial. The trial of the College started in January 2019 and will end in December 2020. The extension will:

- Provide the minimum adequate time for data and information collection to inform the official evaluation of the College;
- Support finalisation of a suite of co-developed courses;
- Realign funding to financial years in line with the budget process.

Total funding of \$188 197.00 for January – June 2021 is sought from the ACT Government to continue the trial of the ACT Recovery College. This funding will allow the College to operate for an extra two terms and will involve

- Holding 15 courses per term which will likely consist of:
 - 7 x 6 week courses,
 - 2 x 4 week courses,
 - 3 x one day courses,
 - 3x 3 hour courses
- Total of 3776 hours of learning delivered in the six months
- Each hour of learning per student costs just under \$50.00

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Background

In the 2018/19 Budget, the ACT Government allocated \$889,000 for an ACT Mental Health Recovery College (the College). The Recovery College approach is recognised internationally as a key feature of contemporary, recovery-oriented mental health services. In essence, a Recovery College aids mental health recovery in an educational setting using educational principles, developed cooperatively by people with lived and subject matter experience. A Recovery College complements specialist, technical assessment and treatment by helping people to understand their illness and learn how to manage it better in order to pursue their aspirations.

The power of Recovery Colleges is two-fold. First, they assist the individuals whom they serve in their personal and collective journeys of recovery. Second, they assist organisations and services to become more recovery focused. The creation of recovery-focused services requires a major transformation in purpose and relationships: a focus on rebuilding lives rather than reducing symptoms alone and a partnership between equals, rather than ‘experts’ and ‘patients’. By doing so, they are also powerful agents for breaking down the destructive barriers between “them” and “us” that perpetuate stigma and exclusion (Perkins et al, 2012).

The core principles of a recovery college, and the basis of the methodology used in their design are co-design and co-production – that is, equal partnership between people with lived experience of mental illness, carers and family members of those with mental illness and mental health professionals/clinicians in the design, implementation and operation of the college. Please see below for more information on how the College has performed over the first ten months of operation.

The request for a six-month extension

A six-month extension to the ACT Recovery College Trial will provide an opportunity to collect the data and information necessary to inform the official evaluation of the College; to finalise a suite of co-developed courses; and to realign the College’s funding from a calendar year basis to financial years in line with the budget process.

Provide adequate time for data and information to inform the official evaluation of the College

Successful evaluation strategies are developed with input from stakeholders and undertaken from the beginning of a project. The collection of baseline data and determining in a collaborative way what is important to measure in assessing program success is essential to understanding the impact of a project such as the Recovery College trial. To work towards collaborative development of definitions of outcomes, activities and



outputs, MHCC ACT undertook discussions with the Australian National University's Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) on an evaluation strategy for the College. The Centre with the assistance of ACACIA, the Consumer Carer Mental Health Research Unit developed a proposal for evaluation of the College in September 2018.

However, MHCC ACT was informed that ACT Health Directorate would undertake procurement of an independent evaluation, separate to the Service Funding Agreement between ACT Health and MHCC ACT. MHCC ACT were not included in the development of the documentation that eventually went out as a select tender.

Throughout the period of October 2018 to September 2019, MHCC ACT made a number of queries about the progress of the evaluation tender. Following a letter from the Recovery College Co-design Committee outlining concerns about the lack of progress on an evaluation process ACT Health finally informed the Committee in October 2019 that they had released a request for quotation material to five prospective organisations from across Australia. The timeframe for the provision of quotes was from 11:30am, 9 October 2019 until 5:00pm, Friday 25 October.

At the end of October, there will only be 14 months of the current ACT Recovery College trial left. It is unlikely that the evaluation of the College will commence before the end of the year, leaving only 12 months or less to collect the data to underpin an evaluation of demand for and value of the Recovery College. Given that the kinds of personal development and behavioural change the Recovery College aims to support take considerable time to achieve, this is an inadequate time period for the evaluation.

This evaluation process will provide critical information needed by the ACT Government to make an informed decision about the ongoing funding of this unique model of recovery for people with mental health challenges in the ACT. It is essential therefore for the integrity of the trial that the organisation that is successful in gaining the evaluation contract has adequate time to gather and analyse the information. A six month extension of the Recovery College trial will allow for a more comprehensive and meaningful evaluation to be undertaken.

Finalise a suite of co-developed courses

One the main characteristics of recovery colleges is that they evolve to meet the needs of their community. One way that they do this is in the production of course that are relevant to and needed by their community. In the short time since the College opened, we have co-produced a number of course each term including:

- three co-developed in first term
- eleven co-developed in second term
- four co-developed in the third term



- five scheduled to be developed for the first term in 2020.

These courses are co-developed, trialled at the college and evaluated and updated from feedback gathered from students and educators. The college anticipates that all courses will continue to undergo a continuous facilitation and review cycle incorporating feedback from all participants. These courses are the main resource produced from the Recovery College trial and will be of tremendous benefit for the ACT Community. Whilst we anticipate that there will be overwhelming evidence for continuation of the College after the trial, there is no guarantee that funds will be made available to continue the work of the College. As such, we want to finalise the suite of 25-30 co-produced courses as a package that that can be used by the community even if the College is not funded after the trial.

Realign funding to financial years in line with the budget process

After the budget announcement, ACT Health suggested that MHCC ACT submit a proposal for the delivery of an ACT Mental Health Recovery College Trial. In August 2018, MHCC ACT submitted a proposal to ACT Health. Verbatim advice from ACT Health suggested that funding would be made available after appropriations bills were finalised in September. However, due to ACT Health procurement process delays a service level funding agreement was not provided to MHCC ACT until early 2019 and not signed until 12 March 2019. The delay in securing funding meant not only did we have to change the timing of the trial, but also meant that it was only possible to conduct three terms of courses rather than four in the first year. Due to all the delays, MHCC ACT requested changes to the timing of the agreement to calendar year rather than financial year to ensure that the College had the benefit of a full two-year trial.

A budget has been developed including salaries for existing staff, course facilitation and review and other costs including rental of premises (please see below for more details). A total amount of \$188 197.00 for January – June 2021 is sought from the ACT Government. This funding will allow the College to operate for an extra two terms and will involve holding 15 course per term which will likely consist of:

- 7 x 6 week courses,
- 2 x 4 week courses,
- 3 x one day courses,
- 3x 3 hour courses

A total of 3776 hours of learning would be delivered in the six months with each hour of learning costing just under \$50.00 per student.



Budget for six months January to June 2021

Item	Details	Cost
Staff costs		
Management	MEA level 7 pay point 3, 780 hours (30 per week X 26 weeks+ 15% 'on-costs')	\$43,971.00
Education	MEA level 7 pay point 3, 780 hours (30 per week X 26 weeks, + 15% 'on-costs')	\$43,971.00
Admin	MEA level 4 pay point 4, 572 hours (22 hours per week X 26 weeks) + 15% 'on-costs'	\$24,839.00
Staffing totals		\$112,781.00
Course costs		
Facilitation cost	7 x 6 week courses, 2 x 4 week courses, 3 x one day course, 3x 3 hour course= 236 hrs x 2 terms = 472 x\$40	\$18,880.00
Course revision and finalisation		\$4000.00
Printing, resources	56 session x2 terms x\$50	\$5600.00
Course Costs		\$28,480.00
Other Costs		
Rental		23,595.00
Electricity		3400.00
Security		306.00
Equipment	Photocopier lease	1335.00
Repair Maintenance and cleaning		3000.00
IT support		1500.00
Security		600.00
Telecommunications		1200.00
Marketing for courses		3000.00
Venue Hire		3000.00
Stationary, postage		2000.00
Other Costs		\$46,936.00
Summary		
Staffing totals		\$112,781.00
Course Costs		\$28,480.00
Other Costs		\$46,936.00
Total		\$188,197.00



ACT Recovery College: The first ten months

In the first three months of the year, the College was situated in the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT (MHCC ACT) offices, working on:

- Identifying and engaging educators;
- looking for and leasing premises for the College;
- developing a brand for the College and
- arranging to purchase co-produced courses for delivery in early stages.

MHCC ACT Board, management and staff were very generous with their time and resources, with the funding for the College finally settled on 12 March 2019. The college moved to their new premises just before the official opening on 10 April 2019 with around 30 people attending the opening. The following week the College held an Open Week with the College open for visitors each morning. We had over 100 people drop in to have a look and talk to us about the College.

The college has run a total of 30 courses on the second and third school terms with a total of 231 students attending the courses with 205 (83%) completing. The percentage of students completing a multi week course in these two terms is a little lower (73%) but well within other established recovery college completion rates. The College is currently holding sessions for 14 courses for the last term of the year with 73 students enrolled in the courses at the end of October of which 44% are existing students and 56% new students. At this stage after only two completed terms, the college is performing at a level that we anticipated would be possible at the end of the trial period. We are running courses on a variety of subjects, of differing durations and lengths. These consist of:

- ACT Recovery College courses specifically co developed for the College;
- courses delivered by third party organisations under the auspices of the Recovery College; and
- courses developed by and purchased from the Mind Recovery College.

Please see Attachment One for a list of courses.

The College has been successful in obtaining funding grants of over \$50,000 to develop and conduct courses on a number of subjects including physical activity, trauma informed practice and recovery and the NDIS. The College was also successful in gaining a small grant to cover some setup and promotion costs.

Preliminary data on students

Although the formal evaluation of the trial has not commenced, the College has drafted a data collection strategy. This strategy has informed the gathering of information from a variety of sources including enrolment forms and feedback forms completed at the beginning and end of each session by the students and educators. Feedback on the College



and the difference attending course has made for student is also sought at the end of each term.

Of the students who informed the college of how they were made aware of the services of the Recovery College, around a quarter said they heard about the College from either media, Facebook or the internet, or from a community organisation. About 15 per cent from their family and friends or from consumer or carer representative groups. Only 10 per cent heard about the College from ACT Health. Other sources were other educational establishments, job seeking support services and through working in the sector.

Over 170 people have enrolled in courses for one or more terms. Based on responses where students provided an answer, just over three quarters of the students identified as consumers and 12 per cent stated that they were receiving support from the NDIS. Three quarters of students identified as female. Over half of the students were older than 40 years, however there were around a quarter who were under the age of 30.

Around 3.5 per cent of students identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. A further 13% of students identified as having a CALD background, 8.5 per cent identified as having English as a second language. 10 percent of students indicated that they part of the LGBTIQ+ community and a further 8 percent indicating that they prefer not to say. Around a quarter of students were in some form of employment, with a further 12 percent looking for work. 6 per cent of people are attending other educational facilities and around a third of student either volunteer on a regular basis or would like the opportunity to take on a volunteering role.

Of those students who responded to these questions, 40 of them had been hospitalised in the last two years for their mental health issues. 17 students had attempted suicide or had suicidal thoughts in the last two years and 16 had sought help for drug and alcohol problems.

A process to collect information from students post participation in the college will be implemented towards the end of the year. However anecdotal evidence from participants has seen:

- one educator obtaining full time work and
- one student attaining part time work
- one student has enrolled in a certificate III course at CIT.
- several students progressed from student status to co-facilitation of courses.

Course feedback forms are completed pre and post session from students. Whilst an analysis of this data has not been undertaken, an initial examination of the data shows most of the students were agreed or strongly agreed that they felt better about themselves after the course and they felt more hopeful about their recovery.



“I enjoyed the one to one approach, [the educator’s] technical expertise as well as his creativity, patience, approachability, supportiveness, confidence and reassurance as well as the overall acceptance and openness of all group members, everyone’s good humour and ease with each other…… I felt privileged to receive the level of attention that I did and was filled with happiness at not only being challenged but contributing to something that on my own would be unachievable. This course embodies what the Recovery Centre stands for – learning, connection, opportunity, hope. I would, and actually already have, thoroughly recommended this course. I would really like to sign up for this course again as I think this is a fabulous opportunity to advance my skills further in a very supportive environment.”
(Sound Recovery Student)

Feedback from end of term gathering

The College has provided:

“Sense of self - self-esteem has been revived thanks to positive support from both ‘teachers’ and ‘students.’”

“The power and importance of identifying my own strengths & abilities (rather than as a mental illness).”

Hope and connectedness are areas that students identify as being major benefits from attending the Recovery College:

“I now feel like I’m part of community that I didn’t know was there.”

“Previously I have sometimes felt like I was slipping into a black hole but now have some coping mechanisms that help immensely.”

“..such as welcoming, friendly team & environment at the college. I’ve never felt so accepted as I am (non-judgmentally) I (feel) as though I belong fully.”

Attending the Recovery College is motivating students to get involved beyond the level of student:

“I love the Recovery College, it’s like a ray of sunshine in my life and I am very thankful for the opportunity to attend courses and in the future be a peer supporter/peer educator.”



Attachment One: List of courses held

Third party organisations under the auspices of the Recovery College

- Creative Self Care (6 week course)
- Honest, Open Proud (4 week course)
- Cycle of Change (2 hour course)
- DoNOHarm (3 hour course)
- Partners in Research (2 week course)
- Understanding our distress (3 hour course)
- Understanding the NDIS (2 day course)

Existing courses,

- Anxiety (6 week course)
- Understanding Self Harm. (3 week course)
- Leading our recovery (3 hour course)

ACT Recovery College courses specifically co developed for the College.

- Movement is Medicine (6 week course)
- Get Movin' and Grovin'(6 week course)
- Healthy Living (6 week course)
- Mindfulness (6 week course)
- Understanding Borderline Personality
- Tree of Life Dreamcatcher (3 hour course)
- Shall we go down the rabbit hole? (6 week course)
- Goal Setting for your Wellbeing (1 day course)
- Navigation the ACT Health System (2 week course)
- Upcycling Coasters (3 hour course)
- Exploring Problem Solving (1 day course)
- Food for Thought (3 hour course)
- Learning about Distress Tolerance (3 hour course)



- Identifying Strengths (1 day course)
- Lived Experience Storytelling (3 week course)
- Community Connection and belonging (6 week course)
- Overcoming self stigma (6 Week course)
- Sound Recovery (6 week course)