

CASE STUDY 11.2: Planning for Mental Health Services

Modified from: Harris MG, Buckingham WJ, Pirkis J, Groves A, Whiteford H. Planning estimates for the provision of core mental health services in Queensland 2007–2017. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry* 2012;46(10):982–994.

According to the guidelines developed by the World Health Organization, mental health service planning involves specification of strategies, time frames, indicators, and resources to achieve the objectives articulated in the health policy of a country or region. The following case study describes the methods adopted by a team of Australian researchers to develop resource target recommendations to guide the development of Queensland Plan for Mental Health Services 2007–2017. The purpose of the plan is to deliver the following core public mental health services: (1) inpatient services, (2) adult residential rehabilitation services, (3) supported accommodation, (4) ambulatory care mental health services, and (5) community support services. The methods adopted by the researchers were based on a combination of empirical evidence and planning models reported in the literature on health services planning. The work to develop recommendations for Queensland Plan for Mental Health Services 2007–2017 was done in the five steps described next.

In step 1, the researchers assessed the need for mental health services in the population by estimating the prevalence of mental disorders in Queensland by age group and severity. This was done by using a model that employs data from the Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well Being, supplemented by data from other local and international surveys. National-level prevalence estimates of mental disorders thus derived were then applied to the population of Queensland to get the number of mental health patients in each age and severity group. Employing health services utilization data from various sources, the researchers then estimated the proportion of people with a specific mental disorder and level of severity who would have received treatment in various parts of the healthcare system. In step 2, the mix and level of specialized mental health services availability in Queensland were compared with reference standards against which the performance of Queensland could be assessed. The indicators used for benchmarking included the number of designated psychiatric beds, full-time equivalent direct-care staff in ambulatory care settings, and community accommodation (housing) support services.

In step 3, the impact of standards set in 1996 under Queensland Ten-Year Mental Health Strategy was assessed by examining 5-year trends in the utilization of inpatient and ambulatory care public mental health services. In step 4, benchmark information on resource targets from government-endorsed mental health plans and other sources was reviewed to develop age-specific standardized mental health resource targets per 100,000 population for the five core mental health service components in Queensland. In the fifth and final step, information obtained in steps 1–4 was combined to set resource targets for the five core service components in Queensland.

The researchers estimated that, overall, 16.6% of the population suffered from mental disorders, with 2.5% having severe and 4.5% having moderate-intensity mental health problems. Among children and adolescents (0 to 17 years), 15.6% suffered from mental disorders, with 2.1% having severe and 5.5% having moderate-intensity mental disorders. Among individuals 65 years or older, the prevalence of mental disorders was 12.9%.

TABLES 11.4 and **11.5** show some of the results of this study, including the number of people at each level of severity treated by health services in 2004 and resource implications of the recommended targets for service delivery in Queensland. Based on the data shown in Tables 11.4 and 11.5, answer the following questions.

TABLE 11.4 Estimated Number of People with Mental Disorders in Queensland, at Each Level of Severity, Treated by Health Services in 2004–2005^{a,b,c,d}

Treated by Health Services							
Severity Level	State and territory public mental health services ^e	Private sector mental health services ^f	General practitioner only ^g	Other health services ^h	Total	Percent coverage	Not treated by health services
Mild	n.a.	17,000	25,000	15,000	57,000	15%	317,000
Moderate	n.a.	14,000	28,000	7,000	49,000	28%	127,000
Severe	52,000	14,000	23,000	6,000	95,000	96%	4,000