

MEDIA RELEASE | 15 FEBRUARY 2022

New \$8 million program to support youth mental health

An innovative service to improve young people's access to mental health support is being trialled under a multi-million-dollar initiative from the Queensland Government.

Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Yvette D'Ath said Queensland Health is partnering with the Children's Hospital Foundation to engage Orygen to deliver a digital on-demand mental health service.

Minister D'Ath said the two-year pilot program was leveraging Orygen's existing and highly successful Queensland Moderated Online Social Therapy (Q-MOST) platform to enhance mental health support services available to young people.

"The \$8 million Q-MOST program is offering an alternative for young people to gain access to on-demand mental health support whenever and wherever it is needed," Minister D'Ath said.

"It will provide access to 24/7 mental health support in multiple ways to ensure young people can receive the help they need when they need it.

"The Q-MOST program will be piloted progressively across seven Queensland Hospital and Health Services (HHS) and is also being offered to select local stakeholder partners, such as *headspace* centres.

"Metro South, Children's Health Queensland, North West, Wide Bay, Central Queensland, West Moreton and Darling Downs HHSs will all be initially involved to ensure the pilot reaches a broad stretch of the community."

Minister D'Ath said the Q-MOST initiative stemmed from the Queensland Government's \$46.5 million Mental Health and Wellbeing Community Package.

"This program includes investigating new and innovative ways to provide healthcare services to Queenslanders," Minister D'Ath said.

"Advancements in technology have the potential to open up new ways of delivering healthcare and, by extension, improve health outcomes for Queenslanders," Minister D'Ath said.

Queensland Health's Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch Executive Director Associate Professor John Allan said the pilot program came at a critical time.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant disruption to social connections, community activities and everyday life,” Mr Allan said.

“As a consequence, we have seen a significant increase in mental health presentations and increased use of alcohol and other drugs, particularly for the adolescent cohort.

“By focusing on young people, this program will hopefully address these issues and reduce the number of mental health presentations in this cohort.

“The two-year pilot has commenced, with all participating services ready to offer the program by April 2022, which will provide an ideal period of time to evaluate its effectiveness.”

Children’s Hospital Foundation Chair Karen Prentis said the program would take a multi-faceted approach to ensure young people had timely access to effective mental health care.

“The Q-MOST program will help young people cope with these stresses, through access to 24/7 support, responses to those awaiting in-person support, or alternatives to face-to-face care,” Ms Prentis said.

Orygen Executive Director Professor Patrick McGorry said the digital nature of Q-MOST helps to address gaps in service delivery.

“The demand for youth mental health care has never been greater, and Q-MOST’s integration of digital mental health technology with clinical services helps us address the gaps in existing care models so young people get the support they need, when they need it, at all stages of their mental health care journey,” Professor McGorry said.

To learn more about Children’s Hospital Foundation, visit childrens.org.au

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About the Children’s Hospital Foundation

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