

# The Mental Health Commissioning Framework

Mental Health NGO Strategic Investment Plan



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Health and Community Services Directorate acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

We respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and their continuing culture and contribution they make to the Canberra region and the life of our city.

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# Introduction

The ACT Government is committed to investing in non-government organisations (NGO) mental health services that strengthen the overall mental health system by helping people overcome barriers to accessing services.

The Mental Health NGO Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) outlines the Government's approach to redesigning and investing in the NGO mental health sector. This investment is aimed at building a responsive, inclusive, and outcomes-focussed NGO mental health system that meets the diverse needs of Canberrans.

This paper compliments the SIP, by elaborating on and providing additional context to the Mental Health Commissioning Framework. This paper should be read in conjunction with the SIP.

The main sources used in developing the Mental Health Commissioning Framework include:

- Community consultations undertaken and submissions received throughout the commissioning process
- [ACT Commissioning](#)
- [ACT Wellbeing Framework](#)
- [Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework](#)
- [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028](#)

# The Mental Health Commissioning Framework

The Mental Health Commissioning Framework describes how the ACT Government commissioned mental health NGO sector will operate and deliver outcomes-based services to ensure the needs of Canberrans will be met through an integrated, supportive and person-centred service system.

Through an outcomes-based approach, this Framework will enable the sector and the ACT Government to understand how services are delivering improved care, experiences of support and outcomes for consumers, families, carers and friends. This Framework also outlines structures for meaningful accountability for the ACT Government at a systemic level to ensure that our investment into mental health services is meeting the needs of the ACT Community.

This Framework will be an important part of informing how services are selected to be commissioned, by demonstrating how their proposed services and activities would contribute to the outcomes and domains described in this document. Further information about the selection process will be in the Grant Requirements for each Commissioning Tranche.

It will be important for organisations to familiarise themselves with this Framework and how their services and activities, and the measures and indicators for these services, can contribute to achieving the Outcomes of the Framework.

## The Mental Health Commissioning Structure

The figure below outlines the structure for the Mental Health Commissioning Framework.

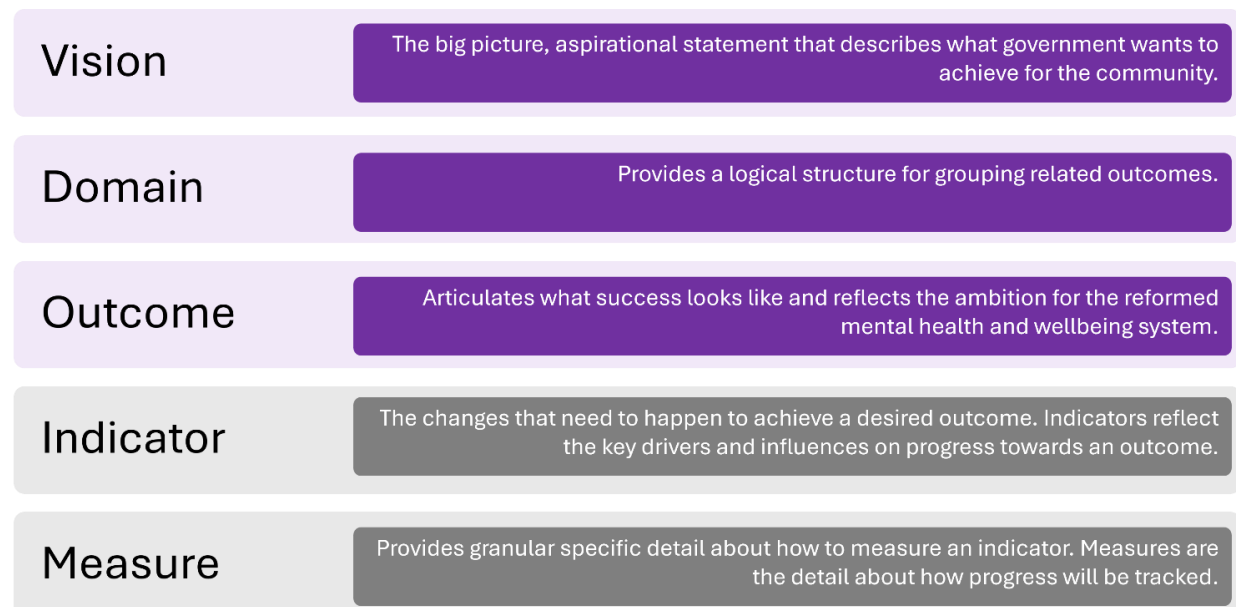


Figure 1: The ACT Mental Health NGO Commissioning System (adapted from: *Outcomes and Performance Framework*, Victorian Government 2024)

## Vision and Domains

Our Vision is that Canberrans have good mental health at every stage of life and can access the services they need to manage their wellbeing. To achieve this, outcomes are grouped into three Domains: Personal, Service and System.



Figure 2: Mental Health Commissioning Framework Vision and Domains

The outcomes describe what is needed to ensure an effective ACT mental health NGO service system. The domains provide a structure for grouping related outcomes. The Personal and Service Domains will support the system stewards to understand if services are providing high quality care that meets the needs and expectations of Canberrans. The System Domain will define how the success of commissioning will be measured.

These domains have been structured to collate information from a range of outcomes at different levels of the commissioned mental health services system. These include domains focusing on:

- outcomes for the people receiving services and their carers or participants;
- outcomes originating from the governance, accessibility and connectedness of services and organisations; and
- outcomes at a higher system level for ACT Government to understand how well the sector is performing and supported.

This document describes each of the domains, and the outcomes underpinning them, in more detail and also discusses where the responsibility of each of the outcomes, and the measures and indicators that contribute to them, sit.

## Personal Domain: People and communities experience the mental health and wellbeing they want.

This domain outlines the key factors contributing to the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. These outcomes focus on supporting people across the continuum of mental health and wellbeing and the ACT population, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the LGBTQIA+ community, and carers and families of people with mental illness.

**Applicants will be expected to demonstrate how their proposed service will contribute to one or more outcomes in the personal domain.**

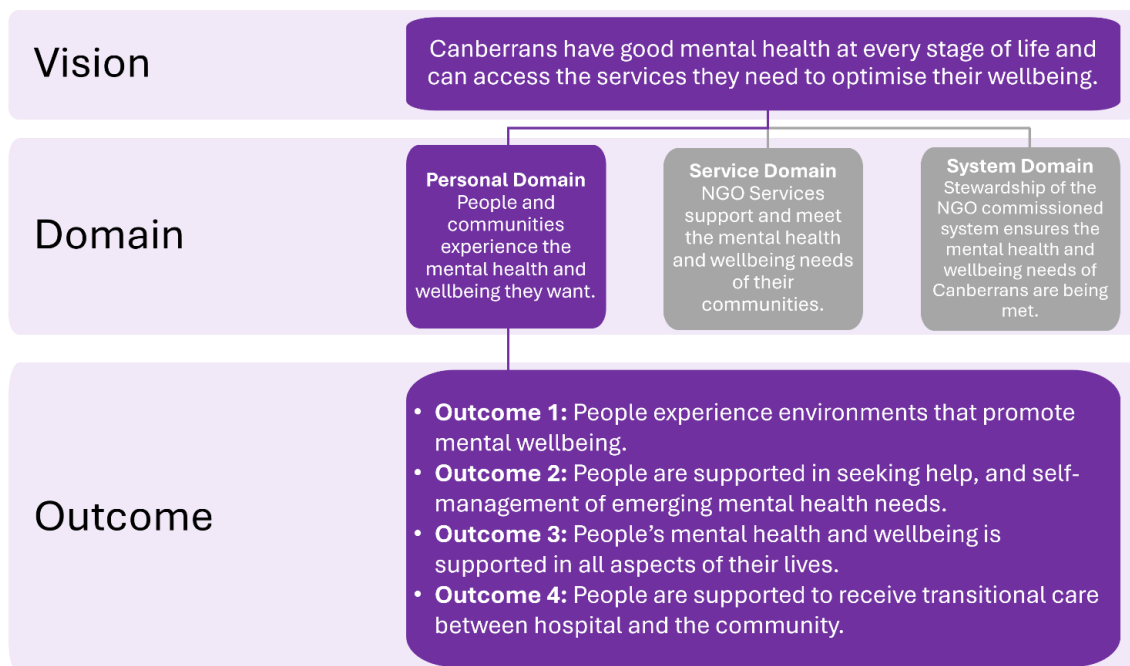


Figure 3: Personal Domain

### Outcome 1: People experience environments that promote mental wellbeing.

This outcome focuses on preventing mental health issues before they arise by promoting overall mental well-being. Promotion focuses on enhancing mental well-being and creating environments that support mental health. Prevention aims to reduce the incidence of mental health issues by addressing risk factors before they lead to problems.

### Outcome 2: People are supported in seeking help, and self-management of emerging mental health needs.

This outcome aims to prevent mental health symptoms from worsening by supporting people to intervene early when mental health issues arise. This outcome also aims to prevent people from requiring more intensive mental health services through early intervention.

### **Outcome 3: People’s mental health and wellbeing is supported in all aspects of their lives.**

This outcome focuses on ensuring individuals living with mental illness or complex and ongoing needs can live fulfilling lives despite their mental health or other challenges. This includes supporting people to have access to psychosocial services that improve their quality of life, social connections, improve coping and help seeking strategies, or ensure that other social determinants of mental health are supported to improve wellbeing.

### **Outcome 4: People are supported to receive transitional care between hospital and the community.**

This outcome aims to reduce hospital admission or readmission by supporting people who require a higher level of support than can be provided in a community setting or who are transitioning into the community after an acute mental health episode.

## Service Domain: NGO Services support and meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of their communities.

This domain includes outcomes that all services providers should implement to ensure the delivery of high-quality care that meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of Canberrans. These outcomes promote safe, appropriate and person-centred services that respond to the unique needs of consumers, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people in the LGBTQIA+ community. When working towards these outcomes, the vital role of carers and families of people with mental illness must be considered. These outcomes were driven by community consultations and informed by key policy drivers.

**Applicants will be expected to demonstrate how their proposed service and organisational governance contributes to achieving ALL outcomes in the service domain.**

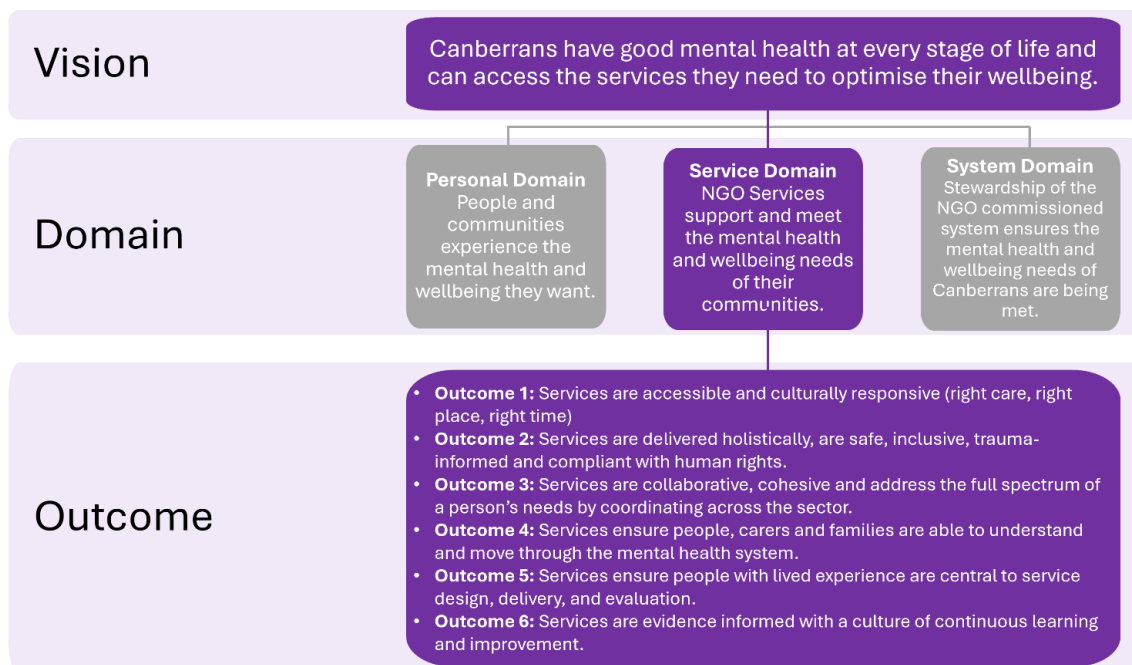


Figure 4: Service Domain

### Outcome 1: Services are accessible and culturally responsive (right care, right place, right time)

We heard from stakeholders that services need to be safe and easily accessible for all Canberrans. This includes services being culturally and sub-culturally safe, respecting and responding to the diverse identities and needs of consumers. To work towards achieving this outcome as a sector, all organisations funded in this commissioning cycle will be required to demonstrate how they are working towards this outcome.

### Outcome 2: Services are delivered holistically, are safe, inclusive, trauma-informed and compliant with human rights.

We heard from stakeholders that services need to be delivered using holistic, safe, inclusive, trauma-informed practices that are compliant with human rights. This means that services should be person-

centred, tailored to the specific circumstances, needs and goals of consumers. This outcome acknowledges that to best support consumers, it is important to consider all the factors that impact their life and wellbeing, rather than solely treating a diagnosis. To work towards achieving this outcome as a sector, all organisations funded in this commissioning cycle will be required to demonstrate how they are working towards this outcome.

### **Outcome 3: Services are collaborative, integrated and address the full spectrum of a person's needs by coordinating across the sector.**

We heard from stakeholders that there should be coordination across the sector to address the full spectrum of a person's need. This means that collaboration needs to occur across the sector and that services should be cohesive. All services commissioned through this process will need to demonstrate their strategy to engage with other services in the sector.

### **Outcome 4: Services ensure people, carers and families are able to understand and move through the mental health system.**

We heard from stakeholders that it is important that services will be easy to navigate for people no matter their cultural background, where they live, or what physical or social barriers they confront in accessing services. All services commissioned through this process will need to demonstrate their strategy to support consumers, carers and families to navigate the system, whether that be through their engagement with other services in the sector, use of peer navigation roles within their service, or their information and referral service procedures.

### **Outcome 5: Services ensure people with lived experience are central to service design, delivery, and evaluation.**

We heard from stakeholders that people with lived experience, including carers, have unique insight into what works in the mental health sector and therefore need to be central to the design, delivery and evaluation of services. Providers will need to demonstrate how consumers, and those with lived experience, including carers and families participate in program development and/or evaluation.

### **Outcome 6: Services are evidence informed with a culture of continuous learning and improvement.**

We heard from stakeholders that services must be based on evidence informed models and implement evidence informed practices. Due to the significant ongoing growth in understanding of mental health in research, it is important that services have a culture of continuous learning and improvement and are up to date with current evidence and best support for consumers.

There are three main types of evidence that HCSD considers important as part of the commissioning process. These are:

- **Research Evidence:** Derived from academic research, typically published in scientific journals.
- **Contextual Evidence:** Includes information from organisations and governments that highlight local needs or the needs of specific groups.
- **Experiential Evidence:** Comes from professional expertise, skills, and practice knowledge, including input from those with lived experience of mental ill health.

All applications should be evidence-informed, meaning they should aim to incorporate research, contextual, and experiential evidence. This approach ensures that programs are well-rounded and have the best chance of success. Applicants are encouraged to present as much supporting evidence as possible.

For more information and support on developing evidence-informed project proposals refer to these resources:

- [Youth Coalition of the ACT – The Evidence Project](#)
- [NSW Government – The Evidence Portal](#)

## System Domain: Stewardship of the NGO commissioned system ensures the mental health and wellbeing needs of Canberrans are being met.

This domain recognises that the NGO commissioned system is a shared responsibility that requires government and the sector to work together to ensure that the mental health needs of the Canberra community are met. Importantly, this includes commitments in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 that aims to ensure equitable health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are delivered.

**Applicants will not be required to demonstrate how they are meeting outcomes in this domain, instead this domain describes the commitment of the ACT Government to supporting the sector and community.**

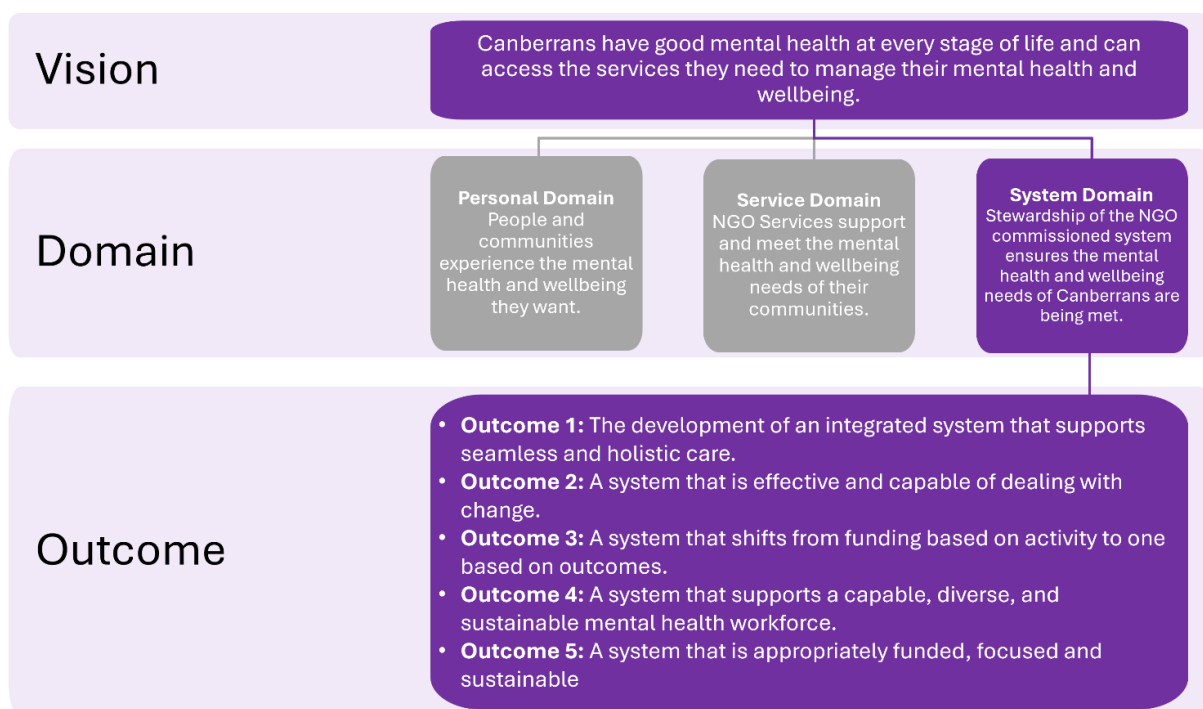


Figure 5: System Domain

**Outcome 1: The development of an integrated system that supports seamless and holistic care.**

We heard from stakeholders that it is important to create an integrated system that supports seamless and holistic care. HCSD must focus on the needs of consumers and consider all the factors that may impact their life and wellbeing to create an NGO mental health system that supports holistic care. HCSD must support providers across the sector to build collaborative relationships to create a cohesive system.

HCSO will achieve this by:

- Instigating regular sector forums, bringing together providers and key stakeholders from across the sector to network, engage, and solve problems.
- Exploring opportunities for sector and consumer collaboration in commissioning

### **Outcome 2: A system that is effective and capable of dealing with change.**

We heard from stakeholders that it is important to create a mental health system that is effectively meeting the needs of the community. HCSO will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the system in line with community need.

HCSO will achieve this by:

- Supporting providers to effectively collect and report on outcomes
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the system based on outcomes reporting
- Addressing system gaps and exploring opportunities for innovation based on outcomes data

### **Outcome 3: A system that shifts from funding based on activity to one based on outcomes.**

The review and reform of the NGO mental health system facilitates an NGO mental health system based on outcomes. Shifting to outcomes based commissioning ensures that funding is being directed towards services that are meeting community need. HCSO will achieve this by directing funding through the outcomes outlined in this Strategic Investment Plan.

### **Outcome 4: A system that supports a capable, diverse, and sustainable mental health workforce.**

We heard from stakeholders that supporting the mental health workforce is key to building a sustainable, capable and diverse workforce. HCSO will support providers to address recruitment challenges and improve workforce stability.

HCSO will achieve this by:

- Implementing longer contracts for successful providers to support workforce stability and address recruitment challenges
- Exploring shared professional development opportunities across the sector.

### **Outcome 5: A system that is appropriately funded, focused and sustainable**

We heard from stakeholders that ensuring adequate and directed funding is important to supporting consumers and services. HCSO will continue to work towards this outcome overtime through the development of evidence based policy and services, and further investment into mental health services.

HCSO will achieve this by:

- Advocating for increased funding in the NGO mental health sector through business cases presented through the annual budget process.

- Prioritising crucial services with funding at an appropriate level. HCSD acknowledges that this may mean that there are fewer services at the end of this cycle.
- Focusing on efficiencies across the sector that can reduce cost pressures, without sacrificing consumer and carer experience.

## Alignment with Other Frameworks

To provide clarity on the desired outcomes of the Mental Health NGO Commissioning System the Mental Health Commissioning Framework has been developed in alignment with the ACT Wellbeing Framework and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 Focus Areas.

Inspiration for the framework was also derived from the Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework and input from consumers, carers and service providers of mental health services in the ACT.

### Personal Domain

Outcome	Alignment with ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains	Alignment with ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 Focus Areas
People experience environments that promote mental wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and life-long learning</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Identity and Belonging</li> <li>• Social Connection</li> <li>• Safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and Young People</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community Connecting the Community</li> </ul>
People are supported in seeking help, and self-management of emerging mental health needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> <li>• Education and life-long learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> </ul>
People’s mental health and wellbeing is supported in all aspects of their lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Social Connection</li> <li>• Identity and Belonging</li> <li>• Housing and home</li> <li>• Living Standards</li> <li>• Education and life-long learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and Young People</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Justice</li> </ul>
People are supported to receive transitional care between hospital and the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> <li>• Identity and Belonging</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Social Connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> </ul>

## Service Domain

Outcome	Alignment with ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains	Alignment with ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 Focus Areas
Services are accessible and culturally responsive (right care, right place, right time)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Identity and Belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> <li>• Cultural Integrity</li> </ul>
Services are delivered holistically, are safe, inclusive, trauma-informed and compliant with human rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Identity and belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> <li>• Cultural Integrity</li> </ul>
Services are collaborative, integrated and address the full spectrum of a person's needs by coordinating across the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> <li>• Social Connection</li> <li>• Housing and Home</li> <li>• Education and Lifelong Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Justice</li> </ul>
Services ensure people, carers and families are able to understand and move through the mental health system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> </ul>
Services ensure people with lived experience are central to service design, delivery, and evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity and Belonging</li> <li>• Governance and Institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> <li>• Community Leadership</li> </ul>
Services are evidence informed with a culture of continuous learning and improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance and Institutions</li> <li>• Education and Lifelong Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Integrity</li> <li>• Lifelong Learning</li> </ul>

## System Domain

Outcome	Alignment with ACT Wellbeing Framework Domains	Alignment with ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 Focus Areas
The development of an integrated system that supports seamless and holistic care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Access and Connectivity</li> <li>• Social Connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Inclusive Community</li> </ul>
A system that is effective and capable of dealing with change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance and Institutions</li> <li>• Education and Life-Long Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Leadership</li> </ul>
A system that shifts from funding based on activity to one based on outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Governance and Institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> </ul>
A system that supports a capable, diverse, and sustainable mental health workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and Life-Long Learning</li> <li>• Identity and belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Economic Participation</li> </ul>
A system that is appropriately funded, focused and sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy</li> <li>• Governance and Institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Community Leadership</li> </ul>