

Children Of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) National Initiative Australia

The Children Of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) national initiative has been undertaken by the Australian Infant Child Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association since 2002 with funding provided by the Australian Government. The overall aim of COPMI is to promote better mental health outcomes for children (0-18 years) of parents with a mental health problem or disorder. This is achieved through the development and provision of information, resources and education for family members across Australia where a parent has a mental illness and for people who care and work with these individuals.

Website

The COPMI website (www.copmi.net.au) contains information for families in the form of three downloadable booklets in several community languages (Arabic, Chinese, Dinka, Hindi, Spanish, Swahili and Vietnamese). The English versions of the booklets are also available in hard copy, at no cost.

The website enables visitors to:

- search for the details of books, audio-visual materials, websites and other resources that can assist children and families where a parent experiences mental illness
- find the location and contact details of programs and services operating across the country by various state government and non-government agencies for families and children where a parent experiences mental health problems
- read summaries of recent, Australian and international research relating to children (aged 0-18 years) of parents with a mental illness, their parents and families
- learn about evaluating programs for children, families, the workforce and communities
- read relevant information sections developed for specific workforce groups (e.g. those working in schools, the early childhood sector and in general medical practice)
- join a news e-list and e-discussion group and sign up to follow COPMI on Twitter and Facebook.

Keeping Families and Children in Mind: COPMI Mental Health Worker Education Resource

Background

In 2009, COPMI released the *Keeping Families and Children in Mind: COPMI Mental Health Worker Education Resource*, the first online learning training resource for Australian mental health workers relating to working with families (and in particular children) where a parent experiences mental illness. The resource can be accessed from <http://www.copmi.net.au/worked/index.html>.

Parent-consumers and carers, mental health professionals, researchers and policy makers from Australia and overseas were involved in the development of the resource. This was innovative and unique in its commitment to the participation of parent-consumers and carers from the beginning to the end of the project.

The resource is free, easy to use, interactive and can be accessed either by individual learners or workforce educators for group training purposes. The resource provides workers with evidence-based information, scenarios to reflect upon and practical resources to assist with supporting families.

National Implementation

The COPMI national initiative was successful in gaining endorsement and accreditation for the *Keeping Families and Children in Mind: COPMI Mental Health Worker Education Resource* with all of the professional colleges that constitute the Australian adult mental health workforce specified in the *National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce (Department of Health and Ageing 2002)*. These include mental health nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists and general medical practitioners. This enables individuals to claim professional development points for their professional registration and accreditation requirements in Australia.

The promotion of the *Keeping Families and Children in Mind* resource has occurred in national and state health departments, non-government organisations, professional networks and associations, conferences and media.

Training workshops have also been held across Australia for 124 workforce educators from a range of sectors wishing to utilise the resource for group training purposes. These workforce educators have assisted in the promotion, dissemination and facilitation of group training within teams and organisations. A number of consumers and carers have also been trained to work with local workforce educators to promote, plan and facilitate group training.

The resource was first piloted in August 2009 with over 40 workers. Since its official launch in late October 2009, an average of 125 people per month from a broad range of professions have logged onto the resource as individual learners. The range of professionals that have accessed the resource include mental health professionals. The resource has also been accessed by a broader range of groups that work with parents, families and children in other sectors (e.g. child protection workers, drug and alcohol workers, family support workers, consumer consultants, teachers, managers, carer consultants, peer educators, speech pathologists, chaplains and early childhood workers).

Evaluation

In partnership with researchers at the Monash University and the University of Sydney, the resource continues to be evaluated through the use of an online pre, post and follow-up evaluation questionnaire (<http://www.copmi.net.au/worked/Surveyintroduction.html>). The evaluation aims to research the knowledge, skills and values held by workers both pre and post completion of the online resource. Preliminary evaluation data of the *Keeping Families and Children in Mind* resource demonstrated a high participant satisfaction and significant self-reported changes in knowledge, skill and confidence (Reupert, Foster et al. 2011). Ongoing evaluation will determine the longer term changes in practice as a result of completing the resource.

Family Focus: Online Education Resource

Background

In 2010, the COPMI received funding from the Australian Government to develop and pilot an online e-learning course that will support mental health professionals to gain knowledge and develop specialised intervention skills in order to work with children and families where a parent is living with depression or anxiety. The new online resource *Family Focus* will be based on the *Family Talk* intervention (Beardslee, Swatling et al. 2004), developed by Dr William Beardslee and colleagues however, will reflect the Australian context.

Family Focus will be a free, interactive course that can be accessed by mental health professionals. It will utilise a range of multimedia resources to engage the learners and to assist them to build a rich understanding of the *Family Focus* intervention, with a particular emphasis on the practical application of the concepts and content. Video will feature heavily in the form of interviews with subject experts, interviews with consumers and children, and detailed demonstrations of the intervention.

COPMI is collaborating with parent-consumers, carers, health professionals, academics and policy officers in Australia and overseas for the development of the course that is anticipated to be available from the COPMI website in 2012.

Content

The *Family Focus* e-learning resource will be developed into six modules. The modules will include:

1. **Working with Us**

This module will provide learners with an introduction to a mental health promotion and prevention approach when working with families where a parent has depression or anxiety. This will also include instructions, resources and demonstration videos of Session One of the *Family Focus* intervention.

2. **Building Understanding**

This module will support learners to understand how they can work with parents to start addressing some of the difficulties that they may have talking to children about their mental illness. This will include instructions, resources and demonstration videos of Session Two of the *Family Focus* intervention.

3. **Dialogue with Children**

This module will focus on the experiences of children of parents with depression and/or anxiety. This will support mental health professionals to encourage children's participation in the *Family Focus* intervention. This will include instructions, resources and demonstration videos of meetings with

children in Session Three of the *Family Focus* intervention.

4. Partnering with Parents

This module will support mental health professionals to partner with parents to prepare for a family meeting, focussing on how parents can communicate with their children about depression or anxiety. This will include instructions, resources and demonstration videos of Session Four of the *Family Focus* intervention.

5. Resilient Families

This module will introduce the concept of 'family resilience' and how the *Family Focus* intervention can promote family resilience processes. This will also include instructions, resources and demonstration videos of the family meeting conducted as part of the *Family Focus* intervention.

6. Enabling the Future

The final module will focus on how supervision can assist mental health professionals to put the *Family Focus* intervention into practice. This module will also include instructions, resources and demonstration videos of the final and follow-up sessions of the *Family Focus* intervention.

Target Group

During the process of developing the new online resource, COPMI has been working with a range of organisations to identify potential settings where families could access the *Family Focus* intervention. A setting with significant potential for the provision of the *Family Focus* intervention in Australia is primary care settings (general practices/family medical centres). These settings have been the focus of significant national mental health reforms with increased funding for the provision of time-limited mental health interventions to individuals with a high prevalence of mental health disorders.

An evaluation of the potential of these settings was conducted by COPMI in partnership with Monash University to identify the current practices and training needs of primary mental health professionals in relation to family-sensitive practice. The results of the evaluation highlighted a significant variation in the attitudes, practices and opportunities for family-sensitive practice in primary mental health care settings. The evaluation also highlighted the training preferences of the professional group. The information will be incorporated into the learning style and content used for the *Family Focus* online resource. Other target groups for the online course will include non-government mental health organisations and public mental health services.

The *Family Focus* online course will be pilot tested in primary care settings in 2012. The aim of pilot testing will be to determine the efficacy of the training course in preparing mental health professionals to provide the *Family Focus* intervention. This will inform the development of a national implementation plan for the *Family Focus* online resource.

For all enquiries about the COPMI national initiative contact copmi@aicafmha.net.au.

References

Beardslee, W. R., S. Swatling, et al. 2004, *Hope, Meaning and Continuity: A program for helping families when parents face depression*.

Department of Health and Ageing 2002, *National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce*, National Mental Health Education and Training Advisory Group, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

Reupert, A., K. Foster, et al. 2011, 'Keeping families and children in mind': an evaluation of a web based workforce resource,' *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 16 no. 2, pp. 192-200

Articles relating to the workforce development and consumer participation in the COPMI national initiative.

Additional Readings on the Australian COPMI Workforce Development Initiatives

Alliston, C, Kluge, C, et al. 2009, 'Commentary on consumer and carer participation in a national mental health promotion initiative', *Advances in Mental Health*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp.

Fudge, E, Falkov, A, et al. 2004, 'Parenting is a mental health issue', *Australasian Psychiatry*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 166-171.

Fudge, E and Robinson, 2009, 'A public health approach to promoting better mental health outcomes for children of parents with a psychiatric disability', *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 83-90.

Reupert, A, Foster, K, et al. 2011, "Keeping families and children in mind": An evaluation of a web based workforce resource', *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 192-200.

Reupert, A, Goodyear, M, et al. 2009, 'Australian programs and workforce initiatives for children and their families where a parent has a mental illness', *Advances in Mental Health*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp.

Whitham, J, Eddy, K, et al. 2009, 'Use of a web-based delphi study in the development of a training resources for workers supporting families where parents experience mental illness', *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 42-54.