MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Evaluation of the impact of Budget 2019 Investment on Sexual Harm Crisis Support Service Users and Workforce (2024)

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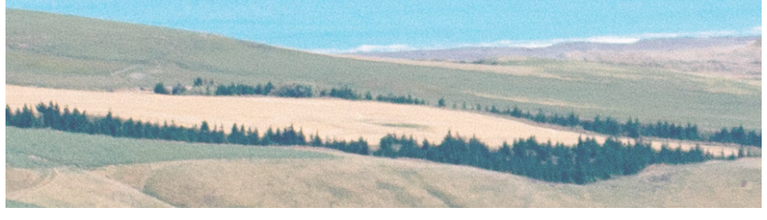
Background

Budget 2019 (Budget-19) allocated $90.3 million for sexual violence services over four years, including the Sexual Harm Crisis Support Service (Crisis Service). The Crisis Service received $50.55 million to increase access for victim/survivors of sexual violence and their families, whānau, and supporters. The Crisis Service offers support to adults in crisis due to experiences of sexual violence. It supports victim/survivors and their family, whānau and supporters.

This evaluation report focused on the impact of Budget-19 funding on the Sexual Harm Crisis Support Service and its outcomes for people who have used the Crisis Service, frontline staff, and sector integration. It was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) as part of a broader work programme evaluating the impact of Budget-19 funding on four specialist sexual violence services. The wider evaluation programme focused on how the funding has been used by recipients to build capacity and capability, and to improve inter-agency collaboration and referral pathways. It also focused on the associated impacts for people affected by sexual violence. This document provides a summary of the findings. The full Crisis Service evaluation report can be found on the MSD website.



Methodology

The evaluation employed a Collaborative Realist Approach[1] to explore the impact of increased funding on the Crisis Service. The methods used within this evaluation understand 'impact' to reflect the meaningful changes that occurred in the lives of victim/survivors, whānau/supporters, and frontline staff as a result of this funding. The evaluation received ethics approval from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. Multiple lines of evidence were drawn on. Methods included:

- An inception hui with sector experts to ensure the evaluation plan was fit for purpose.
- A document review.
- Interviews with ten frontline staff and four victim/survivors.
- An outcomes panel hui with staff and sector experts to ensure the findings reflected the experiences of those in the sector.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom (video call) in a semi-structured style and followed an interview guide developed specifically for each type of interviewee. The data were analysed thematically to understand the significant changes brought about by the increase in funding from Budget-19 to the Crisis Service.

Limitations

The key limitations for this evaluation included:

- The approach used, alongside the complex funding environment for SV services, makes it difficult to determine whether the impacts and outcomes reported by participants are a direct result of the MSD Budget-19 funding.
- Recruitment challenges resulted in small numbers of participants (both victim/survivors and frontline staff) from Māori, Pacific, disabled and Rainbow communities. No interviews with family, whānau or supporters of victim/survivors were conducted.
- Priority communities, including those listed above, may have chosen to not participate due to a perception that their anonymity and/or confidentiality might be compromised.
- Interviews were conducted by Zoom, which may have excluded victim/survivors or family, whānau and supporters who do not have access to the internet, a computer and/or privacy to participate.

The full report provides suggestions for future evaluations, emphasising participant recruitment methods and support considerations for studies involving people who are in crisis or who have experienced a crisis.

[1] A Collaborative Realist Approach draws on Realist Evaluation and Collaborative Outcomes Reporting to understand 'what works for whom, in what circumstances, and how?' It is a theory-driven approach that allows for mixed methods (qualitative only used in this evaluation), explores the role of context, and meaningfully involves stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Key Findings

Increased hiring of Crisis Workers has supported the accessibility and responsiveness of the service for victim/survivors.

More Crisis Workers have been hired as a result of Budget-19 funding. This has contributed to improved accessibility to, and responsiveness of, the Crisis Service for victim/survivors. For example, victim/survivors and Crisis Workers report a reduction in victim/survivors waiting for the service, and a wider range of types of support available to victim/survivors.

> "Maybe an hour and a half or two hours later, he [police officer] got a phone call, saying that this woman [Crisis Worker] was ready and available to meet us at the hospital."
>
> **Victim/survivor**

Services are progressing towards more holistic, wraparound support to better meet the needs of all victim/survivors.

Budget-19 funding has supported progress toward a more holistic, wraparound style of crisis response that is better able to meet the needs of a wider range of victim/survivors and, potentially, prevent future experiences of crisis. For example, Crisis Workers have greater capacity to proactively contact and support victim/survivors, to include family, whānau, and supporters within the scope of support, and tailor the nature of support to the specific needs of victim/survivors. However, some providers remain under-resourced with regard to providing support to family, whānau and supporters.

Victim/survivors have reduced barriers to accessing services.

Budget-19 funding has supported reduced barriers to accessing services for victim/survivors through practical and material initiatives. For example, many providers have invested in improvements in the spaces and/or premises from which services are delivered, creating more inviting environments, and assisted victim/survivors to attend face-to-face support sessions by providing funding for transport.

> "The offices were lovely, got comfortable couches and everything really made it just much more welcoming."
>
> **Victim/survivor**

Funding has resulted in increased staffing capacity, improved workplaces and enhanced staff wellbeing.

Increased numbers of staff and staffing hours has resulted in reduced caseloads and an increased capacity to meet the needs of victim/survivors and family, whānau and supporters. There are indications of reduced staff turnover in some providers. These changes improved workplace culture and uptake of wellbeing supports (such as leave and supervision), helping to reduce staff burnout.

Additionally, improvements in workplaces, such as more comfortable environments, fit-for-purpose technology and furnishings, and accessible and appropriate workspaces, have had a positive effect on staff members' physical and mental wellbeing.

There have been improvements in staff capability.

The Budget-19 funding increased opportunities for professional development. In particular, staff have benefited from training and education related to working in culturally appropriate ways with different communities within Aotearoa New Zealand including Māori, Pacific, migrant and Rainbow communities. Continuing education in trauma-informed and evidence-based modalities of working with people were also considered beneficial and appreciated.

> "I attended a few other trainings that were mainly in the trauma space. And just so important for the work that we do to continue to be at the forefront of evidence-based research for trauma work. So that when we're giving psycho education to individuals and families in our crisis work, that we're giving them the most up to date, most accurate and evidence-based information."
>
> **Crisis Worker**

Improved inter-agency relationships have increased access to support available for victim/survivors.

Providers and Crisis Workers have built and/or strengthened relationships with external agencies (such as Police, Work and Income, Housing New Zealand and health services). This has resulted in improved referral pathways to and from the Crisis Service and improved ability of Crisis Workers to support victim/survivors access to a broad range of social and public services. This has contributed to better availability of wraparound support for victim/survivors when they need it.

> "I think there's a lot more of a collaborative response going on and people working together to build up the sector…I think there have been like, obviously meetings in the past, but I think the frequency and the different groups is definitely increased…And just having those conversations together about who does what work, you know, like, and how do we do it together."
>
> **Crisis Worker**

A lack of direct referrals impacts confidence in Safe to Talk support for victim/survivors.

The evaluation had a specific focus on integration with Safe to Talk – Kōrero mai ka ora (Safe to Talk). Safe to Talk is a national 24/7 sexual violence helpline, which can provide victim/survivors at Crisis Services with after-hours support. Some frontline staff experienced a sense of relief from knowing that victim/survivors had 24/7 support available. However, Crisis Worker levels of confidence in Safe to Talk vary, and this is exacerbated by a lack of referrals from Safe to Talk. Crisis Workers believe it would benefit victim/survivors if a policy of direct referrals from Safe to Talk was adopted.

There are gaps in sector integration impacting on support for victim/survivors, such as access to timely counselling.

Gaps in sector integration were identified. For instance, in some areas necessary social services (such as emergency housing) are not available and waiting times for counselling (including ACC-funded counselling) are lengthening, causing significant problems for victim/survivors and increasing pressure on the Crisis Service providers.

Several factors are reducing the potential benefits of Budget-19 funding.

Limitations to improvements were noted, including:

- Increasing demand for services responding to sexual violence.
- The high number of children and young people needing and unable to access sexual violence services.
- Ongoing difficulties with recruiting and retaining staff in some areas.
- Challenges in translating training into improved practice and in accessing appropriate premises.

Key Recommendations

A number of recommendations for how MSD should support the future development of the Crisis Service arose from the evaluation findings. Recommendations emphasised the importance of maintaining the positive impacts of the Budget-19 funding by ensuring that improvements in staff capacity, service quality and infrastructure are sustained over the long-term. A selection of the recommendations are presented below and are presented according to the groups they relate to. It is recommended that MSD:

Victim-survivors

- Work with government partners to increase the availability of crisis and long-term therapy services to child and youth victim/survivors.
- Explore ways to reduce waiting times for long-term therapy/support and ensure that victim/survivors are able to access them once their crisis support needs have been met.
- Work with Crisis Service providers to include family, whānau and supporters within the scope of Crisis support.

Frontline staff

- Review funding levels to ensure that staffing levels across the Crisis Service are adequate to meet demand, and that remuneration and working conditions are sufficient to reduce and stabilise staff turnover.
- Engage with Crisis Service providers to identify barriers and ways to increase formal, structural and external frontline staff wellbeing supports.
- Review funding levels to ensure provision of sufficient, fit-for-purpose space, technology and furnishings to the benefit of victim/survivors, frontline staff, and family, whānau and supporters.
- Work with Crisis Service providers to ensure that there is effective monitoring of demand for service, and that funding mechanisms and levels are adequately responsive to increases in demand.
- Work with Crisis Service providers to update the Sexual Harm Crisis Support Service Guidelines. Service specifications should identify the components and activities that enable a holistic, wraparound Crisis Service.
- Work with Crisis Service providers to identify any regions that remain outside the scope of the Crisis Service and take steps to fill those gaps.

Wider sector

- Facilitate relationship building opportunities between Safe to Talk and Crisis Service providers to establish a direct referral process, enhance Crisis Worker confidence in Safe to Talk and access to around-the-clock support for victim/survivors.

A full list of recommendations can be found in the full report.