

Understanding experiences of the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program

Insights from people supported by Wellness Connect

April 2026

Daniel was unsure about his first appointment. But that first conversation shifted something. The care and understanding he felt changed how he thought about reaching out for support.

Overview

The Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program (CPSP) delivers individual and group psychosocial supports to assist people experiencing mental health challenges to manage daily life, maintain wellbeing, and stay connected to their communities and services.

In 2025, Neami consulted with people receiving support through Wellness Connect, a CPSP in Adelaide. Wellness Connect is led by Neami and delivered in partnership with Life Without Barriers, Mind Australia, Skylight Mental Health, and Community Access and Services SA, with funding and support from Adelaide PHN.

This consultation was undertaken to better understand what matters most to people receiving psychosocial support and to inform external evaluations of psychosocial programs.

Lived experience and research specialists co-designed the workshop, which was facilitated by both research and practice staff. The consultation involved a focus group of participants nearing the end of their 12-month engagement, whose insights were consistent with findings from earlier Neami research on psychosocial support services.

The consultation looked at how participants understand wellbeing and psychosocial support, their experiences with support, which areas of life they need help with most, and their perspectives on how psychosocial programs should be measured and evaluated.

This *Insights* paper summarises the experiences of people receiving community based psychosocial support through the Wellness Connect CPSP in Adelaide. While the findings reflect this specific program context, they offer insights relevant to broader discussions about psychosocial support design and evaluation. This paper focuses on participant experience within one program context. It does not attempt to analyse broader system access barriers, which are addressed in other Neami work.

Full details of the methodology and findings are available in the [complete report](#).



1 Reaching out for support is hard and can feel unsafe

Participants described how seeking help is often difficult, shaped by past trauma, systemic and interpersonal discrimination, and repeated experiences of services that excluded or misunderstood their needs. Many spoke of a persistent fear of rejection, frequently grounded in earlier harm, including intergenerational trauma. These experiences made it harder to feel safe sharing personal information, which in turn limited the effectiveness of support.

‘Generations before us we were taught not to reach out. I’m first generation not taken from my family. So, you don’t share, you don’t reach out. I only found this service by mistake but even so, your guard is so high it is hard to lower it...I feel like I am going to be rejected, failed, let down.’

Insight

True accessibility extends beyond eligibility and referral pathways. It includes emotional and relational safety, cultural responsiveness, and how services signal welcome, trust and belonging.

2 Supportive, attuned relationships are the core ingredient

Throughout the workshop, participants consistently described relationships with staff as central to their experience. They valued support that was non-judgemental, consistent, transparent, responsive and clearly communicated. These qualities were described as foundational to trust, personal growth and feeling genuinely heard and valued.

‘He made everything so much easier.... he did a support letter.’

‘When I read that letter, you tell your story so many times (pause) it was emotional to read. My voice was heard. He put that into writing, but it was exactly what we were going through, it was spot on, he knows us, he nailed it....’

Insight

Effective psychosocial support is relational. Participants experience positive outcomes not just through service delivery, but through consistent, trusting relationships that make them feel seen, understood and advocated for.

3 Psychosocial support builds agency, confidence and connection

Participants reported feeling more capable, confident and connected as a result of the support they received. Growth was often linked to feeling understood and respected, alongside practical assistance—particularly during periods of emotional distress or when navigating complex systems—which helped sustain progress.

‘There were things I couldn’t unravel in my head, but my worker helped me sort it out—helped me grow as a person and helped me manage my mental health.’

Insight

Psychosocial support is most effective when it strengthens agency and confidence, while providing timely advocacy and practical assistance that helps people sustain progress.

4 Fixed time limits on support undermine trust, safety and outcomes

Fixed time limits on psychosocial support often fail to align with the episodic and non-linear nature of recovery. Participants said that predetermined caps on duration—typically six or 12 months—did not reflect the complexity or variability of their circumstances. Many reported that trust and engagement were only beginning to form as support ended. Experiences of being ‘shuffled through’ services, moving through repeated cycles of assessment, short-term intervention and exit, reinforced distress and left participants feeling destabilised.

‘I’m devastated - what now? ... It feels like goodbye.’

Insight

Fixed assumptions about the duration of psychosocial support often fail to align with the episodic and non-linear nature of mental health recovery. Participants emphasised that flexibility—rather than indefinite support—is critical to sustaining trust and maximising the impact of otherwise effective interventions. Suggested improvements included:

- flexible timeframes responsive to individual need
- graduated and planned endings
- proactive check-ins at one, three and six months post-exit.

5 Groups provide connection, confidence and continuity

Participants consistently highlighted the value of group activities, describing them as particularly effective in supporting social connection, skill development and confidence. Groups were also seen as a way to sustain contact with trusted staff and reduce isolation, particularly alongside or following one-to-one support. Workers accompanying people to their first group session was especially valued, helping participants feel safe and supported in joining.

Insight

Groups play a critical role in fostering connection, confidence and continuity of support. Participants experienced groups as a relational space that helps maintain engagement and extend the benefits of time-limited one-to-one support, particularly when relationships with staff are preserved.

6 People need support across many interconnected domains

A card-sort activity highlighted the wide range of interconnected domains in which participants both received and wanted support through Wellness Connect. On average, participants identified needs across seven different domains, with many nominating additional areas of support when prompted to consider what else would be valuable. This illustrates that people's support needs are rarely isolated, instead spanning multiple aspects of life at the same time.

Common areas included:

- mental wellbeing
- social connection
- basic resources, housing, finances
- cultural and identity supports
- trauma, family violence, legal issues
- physical health
- problem-solving and navigating systems.

Insight

Psychosocial need is multi-domain, dynamic and interdependent. Participants observed that progress in one domain often triggered positive movement—or, at times, new challenges—in others.

7 How we measure success matters as much as what we measure

Participants agreed that any measure of program success must reflect:

- the quality of relationships
- cultural and trauma responsiveness
- their overall growth and wellbeing
- the impact of life circumstances beyond their control.

Concerns about measurement included:

- distrust when measures feel judgemental 'or are linked to decisions about access to resources or services'
- difficulty responding honestly early in service engagement as trust and rapport not established
- fear that staff ratings might be inaccurate or biased
- lack of transparency
- relevance of data collection and/or measures to actual support received.

Participants expressed strong preferences for:

- measures completed with consumers, not about them
- shorter tools
- visual scales
- items that can reasonably change
- tools that acknowledge life context.

These findings have implications not only for service delivery but also for how psychosocial programs are evaluated and commissioned.

Insight

For measurement to be meaningful, it must be collaborative, transparent and context-aware, and avoid reinforcing power imbalances.



Implications for psychosocial programs

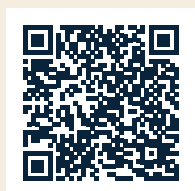
Participants' experiences point to several practical implications for the design, delivery and evaluation of psychosocial support programs.

- 1 Embed relational practice as a foundational element of CPSP service delivery**
Relationship quality is not peripheral. It is central to the effectiveness of psychosocial support.
- 2 Extend or flex support timeframes**
Consider flexible models (for example, step-up/step-down, re-entry options, graduated endings).
- 3 Strengthen trauma- and culture-responsive approaches**
Experiences of racism, intergenerational trauma, and service-related trauma shape engagement.
- 4 Resource and prioritise practical advocacy**
Support with complex bureaucracy or during periods of crisis significantly reduces distress and enhances outcomes.
- 5 Invest in group programs**
Groups support confidence, connection, skill building and peer engagement.
- 6 Adopt measures co-designed with consumers**
Tools should reflect real support domains, allow meaningful change, and be administered in ways that are transparent, trauma informed, and minimise the risk of harm or misinterpretation.
- 7 Recognise whole-of-life context**
Psychosocial outcomes are influenced by housing, poverty, trauma, family stress, and systemic barriers.

Conclusion

The consultation reaffirmed that psychosocial support has profound impact when it is relational, flexible, respectful, and attuned to the interconnected realities of people's lives. Participants' insights highlight opportunities to strengthen program design, workforce practices, and approaches to evaluation, so they reflect the depth and complexity of people's lived experience.

These insights are particularly relevant as governments and commissioners consider the future design and evaluation of psychosocial support programs, including how services are funded, measured and sustained.



Scan to access **Wellness Connect Consumer Consultation: Understanding experiences of psychosocial support and how the outcomes of support could be measured**

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