

The Tern Programme: Preliminary Outcomes of a New Model of Care for Young People with Complex Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms

Exposure to multiple traumatic events during childhood is associated with severe mental health conditions and poorer work and social outcomes. Australian youth do not have access to a national treatment service for supporting their mental health needs after trauma exposure, resulting in many young people going without treatment or receiving inadequate care. The Tern Programme was designed specifically to meet these treatment needs and has recently concluded its first feasibility trial in two headspace centres. Our results will further refine the design of Tern and be used to promote the dissemination of this treatment model within Australian mental health settings.

Abstract

Young people who experience complex trauma are vulnerable to significant impairments in their biological, psychological, and social health outcomes. Specifically, complex trauma survivors can develop severe and complex mental health presentations that cannot be treated by existing Australian mental health funding models. A clinical feasibility trial was designed to evaluate the suitability and outcomes associated with a novel model of care, the Tern Programme, explicitly designed for treating young people with complex posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Fifty-two young people from headspace centres in Townsville and Mackay aged 12-25 received a semi-structured psychosocial intervention for up to 24 months. Data was collected on these participants approximately every three months to track their progress on a selection of clinical, functional, and quality of life measures. This presentation will share preliminary data on participant demographics and primary outcomes.

Australian youth with complex posttraumatic stress are currently without access to publicly-funded, specialist treatment programs. The headspace initiative is well-placed to adopt this new model of care to increase access nationwide for youth that would otherwise go untreated. We intend this project to be the first step for achieving greater recognition and implementation of publicly funded trauma services.