

In and Out Executive Summary

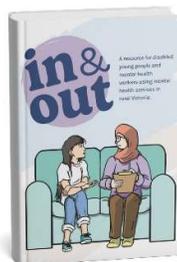
In 2024 to 2025, [YDAS](#) and [YACVic Rural](#) used co-design to try and improve intake and discharge for disabled young people in the mental health system.

We worked with

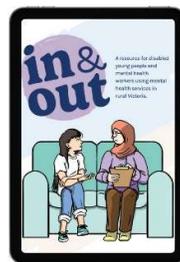
- 10 disabled young rural and regional co-designers with lived experience of the mental health system.
- 14 regional and rural mental health services.
- 78 regional and rural mental health workers.
- Including headspace, Wellways, drug and alcohol, and youth services across Warrnambool and Swan Hill.

We co-created a

- Full report and pull-out executive summary.
- Booklet outline that supports disabled young people and workers before, during and after a stay in a mental health service.
- Booklet prototype to demonstrate the final product's potential and design.
- “Year 3” plan for full design and implementation of the booklet.



[Prototype print version of the In and Out Booklet](#)



[Prototype digital version of the in and Out Booklet](#)



[Prototype outline of the In and Out Booklet](#)

The problem

Disabled young people in regional and rural Victoria face major barriers accessing mental health services, with poorly designed intake and discharge processes. Complex forms, inaccessible systems, ableism and low disability-inclusion literacy cause harm, re-traumatisation and reduced trust. YDAS and YACVic worked with disabled young people and mental health workers from regional Victoria to redesign these processes through the *In and Out* project, funded by the Department of Health's Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Grants program and delivered by a dedicated project team.

What we did

We engaged 10 disabled young rural co-designers with lived experience of the mental health system's intake and discharge processes. Supported by YDAS youth workers, we ran a discovery process to learn about the challenges of the mental health system, then a design process to try and solve the top problems the co-designers identified as important to them. We also sought the input of mental health workers from regional and rural Victoria. They told us about their experiences helping young people, and helped validate or add nuance to what our co-designers said.

What we learned

- Consumers have to retell traumatising experiences too often.
- Intake workers are not properly trained in disability inclusion.
- There is a lack of information before a stay, and referrals and follow-up from service providers post-discharge.

The solution

Co-designers determined that a booklet would be the best solution. It should provide disabled young people and workers the information they need to prepare for a stay. This includes rights, privacy, communication, accessibility and what to expect, bringing the unstated or assumed to the surface. Our young co-designers drew from existing YDAS resources to draft an outline of the booklet. This was tested with workers, who again validated and added nuance

around design, distribution and implementation, including the challenges they predicted we'd face.

Why we think it will work

Workers said the most valuable parts of the booklet were the practical tools (like access needs, intake and discharge checklists). They want to adapt them to their own services or pull out parts of the booklet for specific use cases. Workers strongly supported helping young people understand their rights, build health literacy, and have more shared decision-making in their care. Workers also acknowledged gaps in their own disability knowledge and wanted training to better support disabled young people.

Workers confirmed what young people had already told us: that mental health systems are confusing, and that clear, accessible information and support to speak up about access and care needs is essential for feeling safe and in control of their care.

Workers validated our ability to deliver this workbook digitally and in-person, with no safety or ethical barriers. Instead, the main barrier was ensuring all the services, especially client facing staff, are given the information, booklet and training to use it effectively in the field.

What happens next

- Please share the report, executive summary, booklet outline and prototypes, and long-term plan with people in and around the sector. We need people to understand what disabled young people need, and workers to see and get value from the project.
- We seek year 3 funding to implement the booklet into the mental health care system and measure its efficacy.

Thank you to

Our disabled young co-designers and the communities in Swan Hill and Warrnambool for sharing their experiences and expertise. Youth Affairs Council Victoria's Rural team, the Victorian Government, and the Youth Disability Advocacy Service project team who made this project what it is.