

# Royal Children's Hospital

## Joey Pod: An innovative approach to improving eating disorder outcomes

Eating disorders (along with substance use disorders) have the highest mortality rate of all psychiatric disorders (Chesney, Goodwin & Fazel, 2014). Navigating effective care within the limitations of the health care system is a battle treatment providers across the country (and internationally) are constantly grappling with, whilst the prevalence and complexity of eating disorder presentations continue to increase at expedient rates. **In 2023, up to 12% of 15–19-year-olds had eating disorders** (Deloitte Access Economics, 2024, p.29). Current research and treatment options are simply unable to meet the needs of this vulnerable cohort of young people who experience an eating disorder with co-occurring mental health conditions.

As Advanced Practice Nurses who support young people with eating disorders in different inpatient settings, **we can't help but feel disheartened and defeated that the current service and models of care we provide are unable meet the needs of the young people and families we support.** The impact of the gaps in our service delivery go far beyond the burden on bed availability due frequent re-admissions – it is knowing the devastating impact this illness has on our young people and families, and for our colleagues who desperately want to provide care that is individualised and strengths focused, where the young person and family are at the centre of treating team and decision making.

The development of the Joey program will be pioneering an innovative approach to eating disorder treatment. **The key foundation of the new program will be integrated care – streamlining care to ensure a wrap-around, holistic approach to care for young people and their families, where physical, social and mental health needs are equally prioritised in the one location.** The benefits of integrated care are limitless. For families accessing eating disorder treatment, navigating the system of care can be exhausting, confusing and increases stress within a family already grappling with the immense crisis of their young person being critically unwell. Eating disorders are mental illnesses with physical complications; so often we hear young people expressing their frustration that whilst their physical health is being managed as an inpatient, their mental health needs are neglected and rapidly declines. Uniting the expertise of our skilled, multidisciplinary team will enable collaborative and cohesive communication and care delivery, ensuring the care provided focuses on supporting the young person as a whole – rather than being limited to addressing care needs in isolation.

The Joey program will deliver an alternative approach to traditional inpatient eating disorder treatment; creating a safe and supportive, trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming and LGBTQIA+ inclusive environment. Our vision for the Joey program is to meet young people where they are at, to maintain hope, and provide a supportive and therapeutic environment for young people requiring specialist care during the acute phase of recovery from their eating disorder and comorbid mental illness.

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