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**An Evaluation of a Mental Health Outreach Program: What are the Lessons for Policy?**

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**Objectives/aims**

In Australia, when individuals with mental illness discharge from in-patient psychiatric care, they generally do not receive ongoing support or assistance to facilitate their entry back into the community. Not only does this hinder their recovery, it also results in high re-admission rates into psychiatric settings, which are already at maximum capacity. MIcare was developed in 2013 to address this issue by providing intensive outreach support to those who discharge from psychiatric facilities, in Tasmania. The aim of this study was two-fold: (1) to examine the evidence base of the program and, (2) to inform policy decisions regarding the ongoing funding of MIcare and its wider implementation.

**Methods**

This study employed a mixed-method design including:

1. Quantitative assessment: A number of psychometric measures (e.g., CANSAS, HoNOS, and CASIG) and history assessments (e.g., hospital admission rates) were disseminated to MIcare clients (N= 130) pre and post their engagement in the program.
2. Qualitative assessment: Formal qualitative research was conducted with MIcare clients (N = 17), staff (N= 16) and stakeholders (N = 8). This qualitative investigation examined: strengths and weaknesses of the program, the integration of MIcare within the mental health service delivery, and policy implications.

**Main findings**

MIcare was demonstrated as an effective service that improved the mental health outcomes of the clients engaged and lowered their hospital re-admissions rates. Though, qualitative findings suggested that the impact of MIcare would be far greater if it was also designed as a preventative approach (before hospital admission) rather than just at the point of hospital discharge. The policy implications of these findings include: the implementation of MIcare as a step-down recovery approach across all Australian states and, government investment into developing MIcare into a step-up program that acts as a preventative approach before the individual’s mental health declines and hospital admission is required.