

Twenty years on from the National Comorbidity Initiative – what has changed and where to next?

Chair: Suzie Hudson¹

Chair's email: Suzie.Hudson@health.nsw.gov.au

Authors:

Christina Marel¹, [Jacqueline A. Bowden](#)^{2,3}, Sione Crawford³, Nicole Lee^{4,5}, Sam Raven⁷, [Robert Stirling](#)⁸

¹Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs, NSW Ministry of Health, Sydney Australia, ²The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney Australia, ³National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Adelaide Australia, ⁴Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, Flinders University, Adelaide Australia, ⁵Harm Reduction Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, ⁶Hello Sunday Morning, Sydney Australia, ⁷National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth Australia, ⁸South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services, Adelaide Australia, ⁹Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies, Sydney Australia

Aim: In 2003, the Australian Government launched the National Comorbidity Initiative to address the needs of people experiencing co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) use conditions. This led to landmark projects such as 'Can Do' - Managing Mental Health and Substance Use in General Practice; the National Comorbidity Guidelines; PsyCheck: evidence-based treatment program for AOD services; Comorbidity Professional Development Scholarships; Comorbidity Service Model Evaluation of 17 Australian service delivery models for comorbidity treatment; Clinical supervision for postgraduate psychologists and social workers undertaking placements in AOD services administered by the Australian Psychological Society; and a Review of data collections that reported on the state of data collections relating to people with comorbidity in Australia. The aim of this interactive panel is to reflect on the legacy of the National Comorbidity Initiative, the current state of comorbidity policy, practice and research, and explore where we go from here.

Panellist 1: Jacqueline A. Bowden

Panellist 1 email: jacqueline.bowden@flinders.edu.au

Panellist 2: Sione Crawford

Panellist 2 email: sionec@hrvic.org.au

Panellist 3: Nicole Lee

Panellist 3 email: nicole@360edge.com.au

Panellist 4: Christina Marel

Panellist 4 email: christina.marel@sydney.edu.au

Panellist 5: Sam Raven

Panellist 5 email: sam@sandas.org.au

Panellist 6: Robert Stirling

Panellist 6 email: robert@nada.org.au

Detailed Description of Topics to be Discussed: The panel will be divided into thirds. In the first 20 minutes of the session, several panel members will describe the National Comorbidity Initiative to the audience, including the legacy and outcomes of the programs and projects. The second third will be a facilitated discussion between the chair and all of the panel members, covering: i) the panel's reflections on the current state of comorbidity in Australia including the ability of the community to access appropriate treatment, the capacity of the workforce to respond to co-occurring mental health conditions, and barriers (and opportunities) to implementing evidence-based care in services; and ii) consider where we, as a sector, should be moving to next in the comorbidity space, in terms of research, policy and practice. The final 20 minutes will involve a Q&A with the audience (below).

Discussion Section: Our aim is to encourage a robust Q&A discussion that encourages attendees to reflect on their own practices in relation to co-occurring AOD and mental health conditions. The AOD sector is crucial to achieving long term changes in relation to co-occurring mental health conditions, by embedding the evidence-based responses to co-occurring conditions into core business, and as such, the discussion with attendees is crucial.

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