

cohealth: A model of client-centred community-based specialist Addiction Medicine care

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Background: In Victoria, specialist addiction medicine care is largely located within tertiary institutions, while most people who use drugs (PWUDs) access the majority of their healthcare needs within primary care. This dichotomy results in clients struggling to access holistic care and navigating complex systems.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: cohealth has embedded Addiction Medicine specialists within their specialised primary care centres for PWUDs. This has resulted in low threshold care models and increased accessibility and acceptability for clients.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: The acceptability of this model of care is reflected in client numbers (cohealth services around 10% of clients receiving OAT in Victoria). cohealth has supported regional centres providing telehealth OAT clinics, and is providing addiction medicine assessment and alcohol pharmacotherapies to people accessing care through the community alcohol and other drugs intake pathway. This model has required the development of innovative training models, including accreditation as a site for specialist Addiction Medicine training as well as providing outreach training for general practitioners. This model also allows for the various medical and non-medical needs of a highly vulnerable population.

Conclusion and Next Steps: cohealth is providing much-needed care for PWUDs by embedding community-based Addiction Medicine Specialists, programs and training systems and strengthening coordination between primary care and Addiction Medicine specialists. This model of care is limited by inadequate funding through the current predominant Medicare-funded models. Future directions include linkages between tertiary services and community health and delivering tertiary models of care within community settings including hospital in the home and antenatal care clinics.

Implications for Practice or Policy: An innovative and new model of delivering specialist care supporting primary care in low threshold services for PWUDs.

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