

Integrated Care in Action: Exploring barriers and opportunities through co-design

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Background: The high prevalence of co-occurring substance use and other mental health conditions is associated with poorer outcomes in wellbeing, quality of life and recovery. Although integrated care is widely supported as a means of improving treatment outcomes, achieving this in routine clinical practice remains challenging. This study synthesised contemporary perspectives on the implementation of integrated care in an Australian context to produce a cohesive roadmap to guide capacity building and training initiatives.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: Online co-design workshops in 2022-2023 brought together more than forty stakeholders from across the state of Victoria, including mental health practitioners, alcohol and other drug practitioners, clinical leaders and service managers, peer workers, and lived experience advocates. The Tactile Tools digital workshop co-design method was adapted to ground discussion in persona and journey mapping, and solicit stakeholder perspectives on challenges, enablers, and barriers of integrated care in practice. Workshops were audio and video recorded, transcribed and coded in NVivo with qualitative thematic analysis and further triangulation of data across multiple contributions, participants, and workshop groups to validate findings.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: Six key themes regarding barriers and facilitators to the implementation of integrated care emerged, including 1) understanding integrated care and challenges, including lack of shared understanding, 2) understanding client needs, including the impacts of stigma, 3) barriers, gaps and limitations at individual, service, organisational and policy levels, 4) enablers of integrated care to support sustainable delivery, 5) training, education and capacity building requirements to support enablers and address barriers, and 6) change management and influencing culture being central to supporting implementation in practice.

Conclusions and Next Steps: This study utilised a validated co-design method to scope contemporary perspectives on enabling integrated care in practice within an Australian context. Findings highlight the need for multifaceted and multi-component strategies targeting capacity building as well as culture and change management alongside policy levers.

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