

# **Building Connection, Capacity and Community: Launching a National Online Community of Practice for AOD and Mental Health Workers**

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## **Background**

There is a well-recognised need to better support frontline workers delivering care for co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions. Despite increased awareness, many workers remain isolated, with limited access to ongoing training, peer support, and resources to translate evidence into practice. In response to this gap, the Matilda Centre developed a national online Community of Practice (CoP) which was made available in April 2025 to support the implementation of the Comorbidity Guidelines and broader capacity-building across the AOD workforce.

## **Aims**

This presentation will explore early learnings from the development and launch of the CoP, including stakeholder consultation processes, platform design choices, and engagement strategies. We will also share preliminary data from member feedback and usage analytics to reflect on what is working, what is not, and how CoPs may offer a scalable, cost-effective solution to supporting the implementation of evidence-based practice in real-world settings.

Framed within the broader theme of “Engaging in Change,” this session will provoke discussion around the role of virtual communities in long-term workforce development, especially in low-resource and rural contexts.

## **Methods**

The CoP was developed through a co-design process involving sector consultation, workforce surveys, and input from AOD and mental health workers, service leaders, and people with lived and living experience. The platform was made available in April 2025.

## **Results**

By the time of the conference, initial learnings from the first six months of operation will be available, including engagement trends, member feedback, and reflections on barriers and enablers to sustaining an online professional community.

## **Conclusion**

The CoP represents a new approach to bridging the gap between evidence and practice by building sustainable peer networks and fostering continued workforce development beyond formal training sessions.

## **Implications for Practice or Policy**

Online Communities of Practice offer a promising strategy to strengthen workforce capacity, foster professional connection, and support the ongoing translation of evidence into everyday service delivery, particularly in geographically dispersed and resource-limited settings.