

Breaking the Mould: Testing The ACE-Flex Program in Real-World AOD Settings

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Background:

The Access to Cognitive Enhancement (ACE) program is a 12-session, evidence-based cognitive remediation group shown to improve cognitive functioning in individuals with co-occurring Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) use and cognitive impairment (Nardo et al., 2024). However, its closed-group format limits accessibility: clients must attend all sessions sequentially, and new participants cannot join mid-program. This design conflicts with the rolling admission model common to both residential and community-based AOD services.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention:

To address these limitations, Odyssey House NSW is conducting a feasibility study of ACE-Flex, a modified, open-group version of the original ACE program. ACE-Flex preserves the essential therapeutic components of cognitive remediation (Berry et al., 2019), while enabling participants to join the group at any point during the 10-session cycle. This flexible format is more consistent with real-world service environments, where attendance can be variable and intake is ongoing.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:

The study is currently assessing the feasibility and acceptability of ACE-Flex across community and residential AOD settings. Data collection includes clinician and client feedback, implementation barriers, resource requirements, staff capacity, and preliminary indicators of client engagement and outcomes. Odyssey House is supporting the study through program delivery, staff participation, and access to de-identified client data.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Initial findings will help determine the practicality, sustainability, and potential value of ACE-Flex in dynamic treatment settings. Depending on the outcomes, the model may be refined further and considered for broader application across AOD services.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

If proven feasible, ACE-Flex could significantly enhance access to cognitive remediation for clients who are often excluded by rigid group structures. The model demonstrates how flexible, client-centred adaptations of established interventions can improve the alignment between research and practice, offering a scalable, evidence-informed solution for a variety of AOD service settings.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Tyler is employed part-time by Odyssey House NSW Community Programs at the Hornsby site and is the primary researcher for the ACE-Flex Feasibility Study. To reduce potential conflicts of interest, the Hornsby site and its clients are not included in the study.

References

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