

# Research Capacity Building for the NGO Alcohol and Other Drugs Sector

Presenter: Dr. Michelle Black  
Research Capacity Project Officer,  
Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (NADA)

Contact: [research@nada.org.au](mailto:research@nada.org.au)

NADA proudly acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our office stands. We extend this acknowledgement to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

NADA proudly recognises people with living and lived experience of alcohol or other drug use, acknowledging their important role in shaping policy, education and services.

We acknowledge that through their guidance, diverse experience and peer support, lives are saved, and health outcomes are realised. We acknowledge that participation takes courage, gives a voice, and reduces stigma and discrimination in our community.



Developing data systems to collate data, train staff in survey protocol, and set up an in-house research committee.

## Research Capacity Building

- ▶ Research Capacity Building (RCB) is a broad term encompassing a range of interventions, processes, and systems that support the production and use of research.
- ▶ An appropriate definition of RCB for NGOs is “...a process of individual and institutional development which leads to higher levels of skill and a greater ability to perform useful research” (Trostle, 1992 in NADA, 2022, p.7).

# Motivations – Why build research capacity?



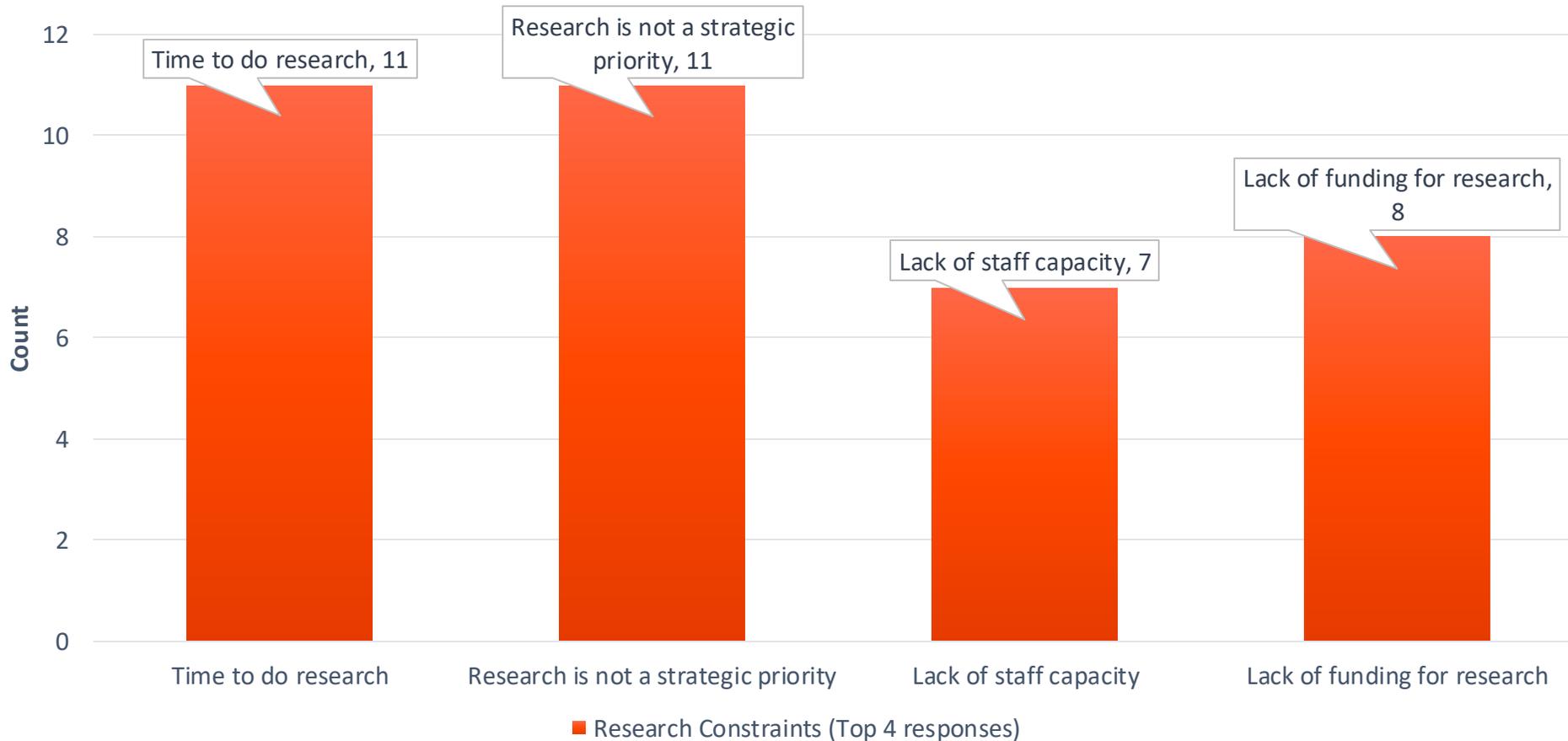
Key factors to help build research capacity in the AOD sector:

- Building and maintaining strong partnerships.
- Using research to improve service delivery
- Providing access to relevant training and development opportunities

Ref: McDonald & Stirling, 2019

# 2024 NADA Research Audit: Constraints to Doing Research

Research Constraints (Top 4 responses)



# Research audit: NADA Member Feedback

## Mentoring and support:

- ▶ “We have an internal research team/ we will do research mostly non AOD, to develop our service outcome measures/ evaluation is important/ program logics and theory of change/ we will and have partnered with the Sax institute to develop our evaluation framework”.
- ▶ AOD Youth Service, Sydney

## Constraints to research:

- “...we did once do research into ICE use... but now constrained in doing research since Covid hyper-strain in mental health and staff./ If could do any research I liked, it would be anything specific in AOD sector to men”.
- *Aboriginal CCP, Rural NSW*

# **The Research & Evaluation Capacity Building Projects (NADA/NSW Ministry of Health)**



**Six funded NSW NGO research capacity building projects :**

- **The Buttery, Binna Burra**
- **The NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), Glebe NSW**
- **Ngaimpe Aboriginal Corporation- The Glen Centre for Women, Wyong Creek**
- **Directions Health Services, ACT & Regional NSW**
- **The Haymarket Foundation, Sydney**
- **Community Restorative Centre (CRC)**

# Evaluation Framework

- ▶ Evaluation Model: Process implementation, and outcomes
- ▶ Assessment of evaluation undertaken at individual, team, organisational and supra-organisational levels (ref: Jo Cooke, 2005)
  - Research agenda: close links to practice, supporting the development of research 'by' and 'within' practice
  - Social impact of research: the direct impact of research on services and clients



# Research & Evaluation Capacity Building Projects

## The Buttery, Binna Burra NSW

- The Grant was used to recruit and appoint a Research Coordinator who successfully established an internal Research Steering Committee.
- The committee has planned various research and evaluation projects, and is currently executing a project.
- The Buttery is now leveraging capacity-building strategies to apply for research grants.

## The NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), Glebe NSW

- The project focussed on upskilling staff in undertaking service evaluation with an external contractor's support.
- NUAA developed and delivered three specialised evaluation training sessions focused on quantitative data, with an additional session on integrating qualitative insights.
- To date, the project has allowed deeper analyses of service data, with impressive enhancement of staff skills in mixed-methods evaluation, strengthening the quality of service delivery overall.

# Research & Evaluation Capacity Building Projects

## The Glen for Women, Wyong Creek NSW

Drawing on Indigenous learning methodologies, this project embedded a qualitative project to evaluate a 12-week Aboriginal controlled residential rehabilitation program, utilising a holistic view of health, expanding research capacity for the organisation.

The Glen Centre project has trained staff to interview former patients and assess social influences on recovery.

The team has conducted around 10 interviews and is concurrently analysing data.

## Directions Health Services, ACT & Regional NSW

- The Directions Health capacity building project focuses on two areas: enhancing client management system (CMS) and evaluating the SHORE wellbeing service in Bega, NSW.
- The grant has driven significant work on system infrastructure, and an external consultant appointed to address sustainability risks specifically replacing the in-house data system, currently in its first phase.
- Refinement of tools and measures for the new system is currently underway, and staff capacity building is growing accordingly.

# Research & Evaluation Capacity Building Projects

## The Haymarket Foundation, Woolloomooloo NSW

- The Haymarket Foundation has conducted staff workshops on outcomes-focused data collection, developed an evaluation framework, and trained staff on key measures. They have also created a theory of change, consulted on IT, and are working with an external consultant on tool development/systems planning.
- The key outcome is that staff have built capacity in system tool development.
- The project is continuing to refine key measures, training staff, and developing a CMS using the new tools.

## Community Restorative Centre (CRC), Canterbury

- The CRC received a small RCB grant to fund the purchase of a STATA license to enhance data collection and research capacity.
- Since receiving the grant in November 2023, the licence has enabled complex statistical analyses of large datasets, supporting client and program outcome evaluations.
- STATA is now being integrated with a new Client Management System (CMS), and a new research officer is being trained in the use of the program.

# NADA's Research Capacity Building Initiatives

## E-Learning Modules

A suite of four e-learning modules will be released by Insight to assist the NGO AOD sector to plan and conduct research and evaluation.

**Modules 1 and 2:** Planning and developing a research question

**Module 3:** Ethical considerations and researching with priority populations

**Module 4/5:** Doing program and service evaluation.

## Research Mentoring

CMHDARN and the Matilda Centre (Usyd) staff act as mentors in aspects of research such as ethics submissions, evaluation planning, and literature reviews.



## Research and Evaluation Showcase

The inaugural showcase was hosted by NADA in March 2025, the 2<sup>nd</sup> is December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10am (see NADA website).

- Hear about the research support available to the sector.
- Hear about research capacity-building projects.



# Evaluation Plan

## RCB Project evaluation

- Pre (Baseline) survey and readministered in 2026 to measure changes in research capacity
- Interviews and observation with project convenors and stakeholders (Complete round 1: July 2025)
- Progress and final reports (July 2024, July 2025)

## Program Initiatives

- E-Learning evaluation analytics: completions, quiz responses, pilot feedback, utility.
- Research Showcase post webinar survey, YouTube views
- Mentoring and research/evaluation project developments.
- Partnership links and inquiries (e.g. CMHDARN)





# RCB Program Impact



Embedding into practice sustainable research and evaluation building skills and activities.

Building a research culture.



# References

## NADA Research into Research Capacity

McDonald, D., & Stirling, R. (2019). Evaluating the capacity building roles of the state and territory peak bodies in the Australian alcohol and other drug sector. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 19(1), 39-48.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1035719X18823569>

NADA. (2021). The research capacity study: NGO services report. Sydney: NADA. Retrieved from [https://www.nada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2021\\_RCstudy\\_NGO-report\\_final.pdf](https://www.nada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2021_RCstudy_NGO-report_final.pdf)

NADA. (2022). Evidence check of strategies to build the research capacity of healthcare professionals. Woolloomooloo, Sydney: Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies. Retrieved from [https://nada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022\\_04\\_Rapid-Review-of-RCB-strategies.pdf](https://nada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022_04_Rapid-Review-of-RCB-strategies.pdf)