

Measuring what's important: including previously under-explored themes of service user experience in a measure for use in alcohol, tobacco and other drug services

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Introduction: Valid and reliable measures of service-user experiences of alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) services should include domains of experience relevant to the people accessing those services. The Service Users' Satisfaction and Outcomes Survey (SUSOS) Codesign Project aims to collaboratively design a validated and relevant experience measure for use in ATOD treatment and harm reduction services in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

Method: Participants in twelve focus groups were asked to identify key elements of positive experiences of ATOD service use, with prompting questions used to further elucidate these. An inductive and interpretative analysis of transcripts identified core experience-elements. A systematic collaborative process with key stakeholders—including AOD service users and peers—guided the translation of these elements into items for the survey.

Key Findings: A number of elements of ATOD service user experience that have not previously been adequately reflected in existing measures were identified, including: a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of safety—physical, emotional, cultural, and gendered safety; feeling respected, and not stigmatised; feeling empowered to participate actively in treatment and support; and having access to workers with lived experience of AOD use. Elements identified through this process were mapped to items, and refined through the collaborative process into a fifty-item measure.

Discussions and Conclusions: This project has identified previously under-explored themes of ATOD service user experience, and the development of a measure that more completely reflects aspects of care important to service users. Future testing of this measure will identify its scale structure and analyse its psychometric properties.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The approaches used in this project have resulted in a unique measure that captures dimensions of importance to ACT ATOD service users, and that can potentially, once validated, be used to drive service quality improvements and person-centred care in ATOD services.

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