

## **Is Integrated Care still achievable? Implementing an innovative co-design approach across specialist Mental Health (MH) and Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) services.**

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### **Background:**

Integrated care (IC) is considered best practice for co-occurring MH and substance use disorders [1-4]. Uptake of IC, however, has proven to be challenging and is rarely sustained [5-7]. Neither top-down nor bottom-up approaches generate clear success [7] and COVID-19 has substantially impeded progress. Now, more than ever, a pragmatic response is needed.

### **Description of Intervention:**

A tailored, co-design approach brought together workers in MH and AOD services at multiple organisational levels. Principles of Design Thinking and Participatory Research were used to identify challenges and potential solutions. Five domains emerged: 1) Workforce, 2) Clinical Care, 3) Clinical Pathways, 4) Clinical Information Systems, and 5) Team Connections.

### **Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:**

Ninety-one participants engaged in co-design activities over two years: Lived Experience Workers, Clinicians, Health Information/Data Specialists, Researchers, Health Managers, and Senior Managers. Whilst individual attendance fluctuated and adaptation of activities and timeframes was required, strong representation across groups was maintained. Commitment to IC was clear, as was the prioritisation of cross-sector collaboration. Over one hundred solutions were generated and reviewed for feasibility and potential impact.

### **Conclusion:**

Co-design enabled MH and AOD workers to connect and to explore potential integrated care solutions. Enthusiasm and productivity persisted despite unprecedented pandemic-related pressures. Critical to success was: 1) engaging clinicians and lived experience workers as designers and drivers of practice improvement whilst also securing participation from senior managers and 2) developing a robust process for adapting to evolving workforce needs. This framework could be used by any organisation to improve care coordination across services.

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