

Evaluation of an Integrated Alcohol and Other Drug Service in South Australia: Short-term Impacts

Mark Thompson¹, Victoria Cock¹, Aboriginal Governance Group², Kirrilly Thompson³, Neophytos Georgiou³, Jacqueline Bowden³, Courtney Ryder⁴

¹Drug and Alcohol Services, South Australia, ²Various: Yadu Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Flinders University, SA Pharmacy Bureau of Meteorology, Drug and Alcohol Services SA, Women's and Children's Hospital, ³National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, College of Public Health and Medicine, Flinders University, ⁴Injury Studies, College of Public Health and Medicine, Flinders University.

Presenter's email: Mark.Thompson3@sa.gov.au

Introduction / Issues: In 2023, Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia (DASSA) ran an Integrated Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Service for people experiencing homelessness or sleeping rough. This 12-week Program offered a culturally tailored treatment alternative of voluntary care for alcohol withdrawal or a controlled alcohol program, specifically catering to the needs of remote Aboriginal clients with harmful alcohol use. The program is among the first in Australia designed to address the multiple and complex health and psychosocial needs of the client group.

Method / Approach: The Program was evaluated through an analysis of Summary and Progress notes, which were both subject to coding and categorisation. An Aboriginal Governance Group was established for this evaluation who had autonomy over the evaluation, including analytic approach and outcome contextualisation of findings.

Key Findings: Twenty-one clients stayed at least one night. Over 63% were managing four or more health conditions and four had 10 or more. They engaged with the voluntary program for an average of 18.5 days, with eight clients readmitting. The Program provided benefits and supports across eight broad and interrelated domains: 1) mainstream housing, 2) Aboriginal-led housing, 3) medical support, 4) Aboriginal-led health and allied health organisations, 5) government system navigation, 6) culture, 7) capacity and resilience building, and 8) social and emotional support. Two clients withdrew from alcohol use and the remainder reduced consumption.

Discussion and Conclusions: The voluntary program facilitated important health and social services to improve the health and wellbeing of 21 clients who had been experiencing homelessness or sleeping rough. It represents a culturally appropriate approach to assist people in need where conventional abstinence-driven alcohol treatment programs have been unsuccessful.

Implications for Practice or Policy: To build on the success of the temporary program, recommendations are made for future service delivery and evaluation, including data linkage and pooling.

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