

Recruitment, retention and wellbeing in the alcohol and other drug sector

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Introduction: A key strategic objective of the *National Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Development Strategy* is to “create a sustainable specialist alcohol and other drug (AOD) workforce by addressing recruitment and retention issues”. In the AOD space, a lack of suitably experienced and qualified applicants is compounded by relatively poor remuneration; highly complex and challenging work environments; a lack of clear career pathway to and within the sector; a context of stigma around AOD; and growing competition between services and sectors due to an aging workforce and burgeoning healthcare needs in the general population.

Method: This paper draws on the *ACT Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Profile 2021*. It utilises both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to examine factors that motivate workers to stay in or leave the sector, the potential impact of external stressors on staff turnover and the mitigating strategies that organisations take to ultimately lessen this impact.

Key Findings: ACT AOD services have faced extraordinary challenges over the past two years, the impacts of which have reverberated throughout the sector. Despite these challenges worker wellbeing has seen marked improvements, and while organisations report difficulties recruiting new staff, retention is high.

Discussions and Conclusions: While ongoing structural issues impact the capacity of the ACT AOD sector to recruit staff, at an organisational level the AOD sector is clearly exacting a high level of loyalty from staff. A focus on worker wellbeing in the face of significant pressures has seemingly paid off, in terms of improved wellbeing outcomes and high rates of retention.

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