

Comorbidity Guidelines workforce training: Building capacity of NSW Health AOD workforce in relation to mental health.

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Introduction: People entering alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment experience high rates of co-occurring mental health conditions, while AOD workers often report feeling under-skilled to address them, citing limited knowledge, low confidence, and inadequate resources and training. Strengthening workforce capacity ensures clients receive appropriate evidence-based care. To address this gap and strengthen workforce capacity, NSW Health funded the delivery and evaluation of evidence-based training based on the *Guidelines on the management of co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions in alcohol and other drug treatment settings*.

Methods: Two training formats were delivered across NSW Health services (government, non-government, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services): a 3.5-day, seven-module, in-person skills-based program, and a one-day online train-the-trainer workshop. Skills-based participants completed pre/post surveys for each module, and a one-month follow-up survey, while train-the-trainer participants completed pre/post surveys only. Evaluation assessed changes in knowledge, skills, and confidence in responding to co-occurring mental health conditions (skills-based) and in delivering the training (train-the-trainer). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests examined pre-post changes.

Key Findings: To date, five skills-based and three train-the-trainer workshops have been delivered to 111 clinicians and 63 trainers. Preliminary analyses show that 85.2% of skills-based participants reported practice changes, including improved recognition of mental health symptoms underlying or contributing to AOD use, and 76% reported perceived improvements in client outcomes. Trainers showed significant post-training improvements in knowledge, skills, and confidence in training delivery.

Discussions and Conclusions: These findings demonstrate that evidence-based training has an immediate and critical impact on improving the confidence and practice of the AOD workforce in responding to co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: The high proportion of reported client improvements among AOD workers, alongside increased trainer confidence to upskill colleagues, indicate substantial benefits of this program for the workforce and clients with co-occurring AOD use and mental health conditions.

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