

Frontline Insights and Experience in Delivering a Structured Out-Client Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program via Telehealth

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Background: Many organizations were required to rapidly adapt to online service delivery during the pandemic. Calls for the use of telehealth are not new, and the efficacy of online treatment is supported by significant research. Numerous researchers have called for this method to be implemented more widely on a permanent basis.

Description of Intervention: Pathways is an out-client treatment service for alcohol and other drug (AOD) use consisting of assessment, intervention (empirically validated psychoeducation in group format), and case management, delivered entirely via telehealth.

Effectiveness/Key Findings: A total of 180 participants were enrolled during the six-month period between August 1st, 2021 and January 31st, 2022. The most common principal substance of concern was alcohol, followed by methamphetamines. There were 962 instances of client attendance at group sessions via videoconferencing during this period.

Anecdotal observations and participant self-reports demonstrated decreased or cessation of substance use, increased pro-social community connections, increased understanding of substance use and coping mechanisms, and increased quality of life.

Ongoing referrals and enrolment indicate continued demand for this method of treatment.

Conclusion and Next Steps: This model appears to be an acceptable and feasible method of delivering community based AOD treatment and provides an alternative format for those facing barriers to in-person treatment. Systematic evaluation of the program's efficacy is still required.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Structured online services allow consumers to access holistic AOD treatment in a group setting alongside targeted, one-to-one case management with a caseworker. The geographic scope for the program's implementation is large and fills a gap for those who otherwise may not access treatment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: No disclosures to report.