

Two years on: Co-locating counselling with Kirketon Road Centre (KRC) South - A primary Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) in ‘the Shire’ in Sydney’s southern region

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Background: The Sutherland Shire community (‘the Shire’) in Sydney’s south is sometimes regarded as affluent, image-focussed and insular which can exacerbate experiences of marginalisation and isolation particularly for local people who inject drugs (PWID). Counselling services are typically based in traditional primary healthcare or private settings which PWID may choose not to access and therefore their needs often go unmet.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: KRC South is a primary NSP with onsite counselling and case management. Staff promote the counselling service to clients and manage appointments, on a weekly basis, booked and confirmed by text or phone. About 28 hours of counselling are provided each month by qualified counsellors. People due for parole or release from incarceration can obtain a referral to the counselling service. The service aims to reduce barriers and provide easy access to counselling for a range of issues including substance use problems, trauma, offending and mental health.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: From April 2022 to February 2024, there were 423 counselling consults among 72 clients (mean age 49 years, 57% male, 16% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander). Average number of visits was 6 (range 1-43). The main presenting issue was mental health (39%; i.e., depression, anxiety, interpersonal issues) followed by substance use (33%). The main drugs used were methamphetamine (61%) and heroin (16%). Consumer case studies and experiences of counselling services will be presented. Established trust with NSP staff meant clients who otherwise may have foregone counselling were more open to being referred to a counsellor. Demand for counselling services in this setting is growing.

Conclusion and Next Steps: For PWID, a need clearly exists for integrating counselling and harm reduction services. A working group, including consumers, will be established to identify gaps in current service provision and better tailor counselling services for PWID in the Sutherland Shire.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: