

Improving outcomes for First Nations people in alcohol and other drug treatment

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Introduction: In 2021-22, over 22% of all treatment episodes in NSW NGO drug treatment services were delivered to First Nations people. While guidelines have been developed to support mainstream services, it is critical that all treatment services are able to provide culturally responsive and inclusive services. This presentation will explore the views of First Nations people on what supports positive treatment outcomes and if existing guidelines are sufficient to respond to the needs identified.

Methods: Focus groups were held with First Nations men and women to understand what supports positive outcomes of treatment. The focus group data were analysed and the themes identified were matched against the domains of guidelines to support services provide culturally appropriate care.

Results: Participants reported wait time and eligibility requirements as a barrier to accessing treatment, in addition to the need for Aboriginal Community-Controlled treatment options. Participants also reported structural elements of treatment as important to supporting positive treatment outcomes. Participants highlighted the need for First Nations workers, workers with lived experience, having a strong connection with workers, and the inclusion of cultural components in programs.

Discussion and Conclusion: The themes identified match the domains of existing guidelines. However, do not address the system issues that are resulting in significant wait time and limited availability of community-controlled treatment options. The results suggest that introducing access and structural measures should be prioritised as measures of drug treatment performance to ensure that the monitoring of treatment seeks to improve treatment outcomes and access for First Nations people.

Implications for Practice and Policy: Mainstream treatment providers should seek to employ First Nations staff and ensure that there are cultural components of all treatment programs. The introduction and monitoring of measures that respond to the needs of First Nations people should be used to improve outcomes and access.

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