Use of standard mapping of service provision to drive mental health and alcohol and drug care systems: International experiences

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Background: The integration of mental health (MH) and alcohol and drug (AOD) care systems is a priority worldwide. Experiences overseas indicate the importance of including a systems-based strategy in health planning and policy at national, state and local levels. Factors related to this trend include the overlap of service provision, comorbidity across groups, and the increasing need for efficiencies in care provision in the context of a healthcare crisis impacting the MH and AOD workforces including the deskilling and professional shortage impacting both groups.

Description of Model of Care: There are several challenges that may hamper an integration strategy. First, there are organisational and funding barriers. Second, it is necessary to increase the cross-collaboration and knowledge transfer so staff in AOD can take activities related to MH, particularly in moderate and severe cases, and vice-versa. Third, there are different models of care that are related to different terminology and understanding of service provision. Finally, we lack a comprehensive assessment of the availability, characteristics and tentative overlap including gaps in service provision.

Implementation: The use of an ontoteminology approach is key to overcome the terminology bias. This requires the use of a common classification system and internationally agreed terminology. The Description and Evaluation of Services and DirectoriEs (DESDE), is a classification of services and related glossary of terms that has been broadly used to describe and compare services across these sectors.

Conclusion and Next Steps: This system has been used to analyse service provision in MH and AOD in Australia and Europe. In 2024 it has been used to inform the integration strategy of AOD and MH services in Andalucia, the largest region in Spain with a population over 8 million people. This experience will be discussed to inform an eventual integration of AOD and MH services in Australia.

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