

Gambling and Substance Use: Responding to co-occurring harms in the treatment setting

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Introduction: There is a high prevalence of gambling harms co-occurring with substance use harms in the treatment-seeking population. Where such harms are co-occurring, they may be experienced as more severe and, in some cases, more resistant to treatment.

Approach: This paper draws on the data derived from research into co-occurring gambling and substance use harms in treatment settings across the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). It forms part of a project which aimed to identify best practice approaches to responding to co-occurring gambling and substance use harms and develop resources to support services to apply best practice approaches. Results of interviews and focus group discussions with a range of service providers have been analysed and are presented here.

Key Findings: Alcohol and other drug (AOD) and gambling support services in the ACT are not systematically screening for co-occurring harms. Screening tools are unwieldy and not fit for purpose. Treatment modalities for co-occurring gambling and substance use harms remain relatively under-developed and referral pathways are ad hoc and depend on networks sustained by individual service delivery personnel.

Discussions and Conclusions: Current implementation of best practice approaches for co-occurring gambling and substance use harm is hindered by systemic and service-level factors. Addressing the way services screen and assess co-occurring harms, identifying appropriate treatment modalities and developing clear referral pathways are key to improving outcomes for individuals experiencing co-occurring gambling and substance use harms.

Implications for Practice: This project has the capacity to inform practice across the AOD and gambling support sectors.

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