

Implementation, sustainability, client and service outcomes of delivering the First Step brief intervention in community AOD settings

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Introduction: The demand for alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment in Australia greatly outweighs the resources available. Outpatient counselling is the most accessed form of treatment, but clients attend only 1.6 treatment sessions. Despite this evidence-based brief interventions are not routinely offered at service entry to maximise the potential benefit of the initial treatment sessions. This project determined the feasibility, sustainability, and outcomes of delivering a brief intervention in community AOD settings

Method: The First Step brief motivational interviewing intervention is comprised of 3 modules delivered over two treatment sessions. The implementation phase of the project occurred between October 2020 and September 2021, sustainability commenced in November 2021 and continue until June 2022.

Results: A total of 20 counsellors from four participating community AOD services received First Step training and supervision. 841 (83%) of 1022 eligible clients were enrolled in the First Step program. 420 (51%) were enrolled in treatment within a month and consented to participate. A total 332 (80%) completed module 1, 293 (70%) module 2 and 198 (47%) completed all three First Step modules respectively. Overall, the number of clients who received at least one treatment session increased 25% during the implementation phase. The 1-, 3-, and 6-month follow-up surveys have been completed by 83%, 78%, and 74% of eligible clients respectively. Since the sustainability phase commenced, 10 to 20% reductions in the proportion of clients receiving the First Step modules have occurred. Client and service outcomes during sustainability will be reported.

Discussion and Conclusions: The First Step brief intervention was successfully implemented and completed by almost 50% of clients entering community AOD services. Small declines in the delivery of First Step modules occurred during the first few months of sustainability.

Implications for Translational Research: The delivery of evidence-based brief interventions during the critical first two sessions of AOD treatment could improve client outcomes.

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