

Mental Health & AOD NGOs partner on dual diagnosis

August 2006 - View from the Peak

The Mental Illness Substance Abuse (MISA) Pilot Project is a first in the history of NGOs working together to actually support and demonstrate the way to creating and sustaining working partnerships.

The Project has huge potential to develop collaborative relationships between mental health NGOs and drug and alcohol NGOs so that they can increase their capacity to respond to people with both mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

In 2004 the MHCC and the Network of Alcohol & Other Drug Agencies (NADA) developed a Memorandum of Understanding relating to a joint working relationship around the issue of mental illness and substance use (MISU). This Pilot Project is one outcome of this initiative and is being driven jointly by MHCC and NADA and funded by the Centre for Drug and Alcohol, NSW Health.

The aims of the Project are:

- * improved service for clients
- * increased organisational capacity to address MISA issues
- * increased worker capacity and confidence to address MISA issues
- * improved linkages between non government mental health agencies and drug & alcohol agencies.

There will be three concurrently running projects in the pilot targeting, youth, women, and adult residential. The participating women's services are Charmian Clift, Phoebe House and We Help Ourselves (WHOs) New Beginnings; youth services are Richmond Fellowship, South Sydney Dual Diagnosis Service and Ted Noffs Foundation. The adult residential services are still to be finalised.

A capacity building framework underpins the project. Agencies are being encouraged to develop strategies in the areas of organisational development, workforce development, partnerships & linkages and dedicated project resources. Initiatives could include a review of current policies and procedures around MISA for each agency (e.g. service descriptions, assessment/ referral protocols, clinical supervision, position descriptions), joint agency information sharing and problem solving; staff skills development and service level agreements such as MOUs.

An initial workshop was conducted in July 2006 in which agencies had the opportunity to identify common areas of difficulty, share ideas and resources and discuss areas for future partnership. The Pilot will run until June 2007 and a final evaluation report will be available.