

Mental Illness and Substance Misuse Project

The MHCC has recently been exploring the area of services available for people affected by Mental Illness and Substance Misuse (MISM). This area is of growing concern not only due to a significant amount of research indicating the high prevalence of MISM, but also the large occurrences of “gaps” in service provision for people requiring access to both Alcohol and Other Drug services and Mental Health services. There is great cause for concern that many people are simply being shuffled between services due to the fact that both mental health and substance use issues are not being recognised or cared for effectively by many service providers.

In addressing such concerns around service provision, the MHCC has undertaken a project to identify and improve training and education programs for NGO staff working with people affected by MISM. The MHCC believes that by developing the areas of training and education, service providers will be better equipped to work effectively within the MISM area and therefore build a more capable, consistent and useful support system across services.

MHCC Policy Officer Ann MacLochlainn and student Andrea Watkins are currently compiling a database of training and education services available to NGO staff working in the MISM area. The database aims to provide a reference point for all relevant services within NSW whilst also promoting advances made in the MISM area in other states and overseas. A summary of the database (in progress) was recently presented by Ann and Andrea at the Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies’ (NADA) Conference in Bondi. Response to the project was very positive with useful feedback received from areas of both service provision and consumer interests. A lively discussion followed the presentation, raising issues such as the need to update training standards; calls for more rural and non-metropolitan training services; and the necessity of practical, “hands-on” training in both mental health and drug and alcohol areas.

A MISM Working Group has also been established to meet regularly at MHCC. The group’s focus is to discuss relevant issues and provide a platform for advocacy regarding MISM topics. Contributions towards all or any aspects of this project from any interested parties would be most welcome. It is the aim of the MHCC to list the database and an associated literature review on our website in the near future.

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