

Update on the Mental Illness Substance Abuse (MISA) Pilot Project

The MISA Pilot Project is a partnership project matching mental health non-government organisations (NGOs) with drug and alcohol NGOs. The aim is to build the agencies' capacity to respond to clients with mental illness and substance abuse (MISA) issues.

The Pilot Project is a joint initiative between the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) and the Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies (NADA). The peak organisations provide overall management of the project and resource the project through a part time Project Officer, workshops for the participating agencies, and a small grant allocation to support the strategies and initiatives of the partner NGOs. An independent evaluator has developed an evaluation framework for the Pilot Project and a final report on the outcomes of the project will be prepared on its completion in June 2007.

There are three concurrently running projects, each targeting a different client group. While having a common overall goal of increasing capacity to meet the needs of clients with mental illness and substance abuse issues, each of the partnership is developing uniquely.

Youth

The partner agencies are Richmond Fellowship, South Sydney Dual Diagnosis Service and Ted Noffs Foundation. The main initiative of the partnership is a Forum for the staff of the partners agencies. The Forum will provide an opportunity for each of the partners to present their service delivery models in depth, and from their shared experiences to formulate and document their knowledge on collaborative care models. The partnership is also working sharing data collection methods with the aim of assisting research in the area of young people and MISA issues. Networking and resources sharing is also occurring with the South Sydney Youth Dual Diagnosis drama group performing at the Youth Dual Diagnosis Forum organised by Richmond Fellowship for Mental Health Week.

Women

The partner agencies are Charmian Clift, Phoebe House and WHOS New Beginnings Women Services. The main initiative is the development of customised training for staff in the partner agencies. Training is being developed and will focus on sharing expertise and experience between the agencies and will include a component on parenting issues for women with MISA issues. Other initiatives being explored are staff swaps and site visits.

Adult residential

The partner agencies are Hunter region PRA and WHOS. This partnership was the last to join the Project. At this stage Initiatives being considered are site visits for staff, staff swaps and training, and joint case management of some clients.

A key feature of the project to date has been the informal contact and communication that has developed between the partner agencies. Additionally, through regular Project workshop there has also been contact across the three partnerships groups. Although working with different target groups common themes and issues have emerged. Agencies have had time to share their experience, recognise the expertise and are starting to identify potential ways of working together to share and pass on this expertise. There has also been the opportunity to collectively problem solve solutions barriers confronting work in this area.

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