

CMHDARN Research Skills  
Webinar Series – Webinar 2 –  
Developing a research question

The Community Mental Health  
Drug and Alcohol Research Network (CMHDARN)  
is a collaborative project between  
the Network of Alcohol & Other Drugs Agencies (NADA),  
the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) and the  
NSW Mental Health Commission



# What is a research question

One to two sentences that describe what you are investigating

- Make wording as specific as possible

Wording depends on the research methods used (e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative)

***Getting your research question right will set the foundation for an effective project.***

# Steps in developing a research question

**Step 1:** Define your area of interest

**Step 2:** Explore for other research in the area

**Step 3:** Consider the data that might be required

**Step 4:** Draft your research question

**Step 5:** Refine the research question



# Step 1: Define your area of interest

## Ask yourself

- What topic / area do I want to find out about?
- What is an area that we need to know more about?
- What would be valuable for my service / colleagues / the broader community?
- What is of interest to me?



The topic is too broad or so complex it would take a thousand years to answer (if at all)

# Step 2: Explore for other research in the area

Look for what else is out there.

- Has someone else looked at this exact topic before?
  - What did they find?
  - Can it be applied to your setting?
  - Can it help to guide your research?

You avoid “re-inventing the wheel” or you discover a really useful answer



You discover your area of passion is already over-researched

# Step 3: Consider the data that might be required

## Ask yourself

- What data do I already have access to?
- What kind of data would I need to be able to explore this area?
- How easy would it be to get that data?
- How long would it take to get it?

You have easy access to data that will answer your question.



The data you will need will be complex to access or take a long time to gather.

# Step 4: Draft your research question

- Start with “What”, “How”
- Specify the topic and what you will be looking for.
- For “intervention”-based research, the PICO acronym can be helpful
  - Participants
  - Intervention
  - Control / Comparison
  - Outcome



# Step 5: Refine the research question

Once you have drafted your question, review and refine it, thinking about:

- It is specific?
- Can the question be answered?
- Does it avoid simple “yes” / “no” answers?
- Is it feasible?
- Can you access / collect the right data to answer the question?
- The “So what?” – How will it be helpful to you, your colleagues or your service?



# Other considerations

- Ethical considerations
- Research mentoring
- Participation and buy in from other staff



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**Research Skills Webinar 2:**

Developing a Research  
Question

NADA proudly acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our office stands. We extend this acknowledgement to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

# Overview

- Research vs. Evaluation
- Scenario 1
- Scenario 2



# Research vs. Evaluation



The act of searching carefully for or pursuing a specified thing or person (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010)



Evaluation is the objective assessment of a program (or project's) design, implementation and results (NADA, 2016)

# Developing a research question

**Step 1:** Define your area of interest

**Step 2:** Explore for other research in the area

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# Scenario 1

*Joycelyn is a mental health counsellor with an NGO community service which provides one-on-one and group therapy to clients.*

*After a group session, a client comes up to Joycelyn and discloses that they will stop coming to the group sessions. She has noticed that lately more and more clients are only coming to 2-3 sessions of the 6-week program.*

*Joycelyn discusses this with her manager, and she is tasked with finding out why client attendance for the group sessions has dropped.*

# Scenario 1

Joycelyn is a mental health counsellor with an NGO community service which provides **one-on-one and group therapy** to **clients**.

**After a group session**, a client comes up to Joycelyn and discloses that **they will stop coming to the group sessions**. She has noticed that lately more and more clients are only coming to **2-3 sessions of the 6-week program**.

Joycelyn discusses this with her manager, and she is tasked with finding out why **client attendance** for **the group sessions** has **dropped**.

# Scenario 1



Jocelyn

## Step 1: Define your area of interest

- Effectiveness of the program itself?
- Or more about what leads to client “drop-out”?

## Step 2: Explore for other research in the area

- Advantage – Jocelyn may already be aware of factors impacting client drop-out
- Caution – always verify assumed knowledge with other sources

# Scenario 1



Jocelyn

**Step 3:** Consider the data that might be required

- Client feedback – interviews, focus group
- If collected, can MDS data be used?
- What kind of other routine data is collected? E.g., outcomes like quality of life, etc.
- Ethical considerations – what are you going to use the data for?

# Scenario 1



Jocelyn

## Step 4: Draft your research question

- Why do people participating in a mental health program drop out after 2-3 weeks?

## Step 5: Refine the research question

- Is there a difference in the retention of clients enrolled in group therapy or one-on-one counselling after 6 weeks?

# Scenario 2

*Addison works with an NGO AOD service that delivers preventative programs for the general public.*

*They attend a seminar about a new evidence-based intervention developed in America for reducing anxiety symptoms. Excited, Addison approaches their manager about adding the intervention program to the service.*

*Addison's manager thinks it is a good idea, but the service will need to apply for funding to set up the intervention. They are tasked with pulling together the evidence that will be used to justify why the new intervention should be funded.*

# Scenario 2

*Addison works with an NGO AOD service that delivers preventative programs for the general public.*

*They attend a seminar about a new evidence-based intervention developed in America for reducing anxiety symptoms. Excited, Addison approaches their manager about adding the intervention program to the service.*

*Addison's manager thinks it is a good idea, but the service will need to apply for funding to set up the intervention. They are tasked with pulling together the evidence that will be used to justify why the new intervention should be funded.*

# Scenario 2



Addison

## Step 1: Define your area of interest

- Pre-existing research on the intervention
- Is anxiety linked with AOD use?

## Step 2: Explore for other research in the area

- Review the evidence carefully – what type of research or evaluation has been completed on the intervention?
- Can reducing anxiety symptoms been an effective prevention strategy for people seeking help with their AOD use?

# Scenario 2



Addison

**Step 3:** Consider the data that might be required

- Does data need to be collected for this research?
- Pilot testing – like a trial run
- Could use MDS, other routine data, etc. to gauge effectiveness during piloting of intervention
- Ethical considerations – what are you going to use the data for?

# Scenario 2



Addison

## Step 4: Draft your research question

- Does reducing anxiety symptoms help people seeking help for their AOD use?

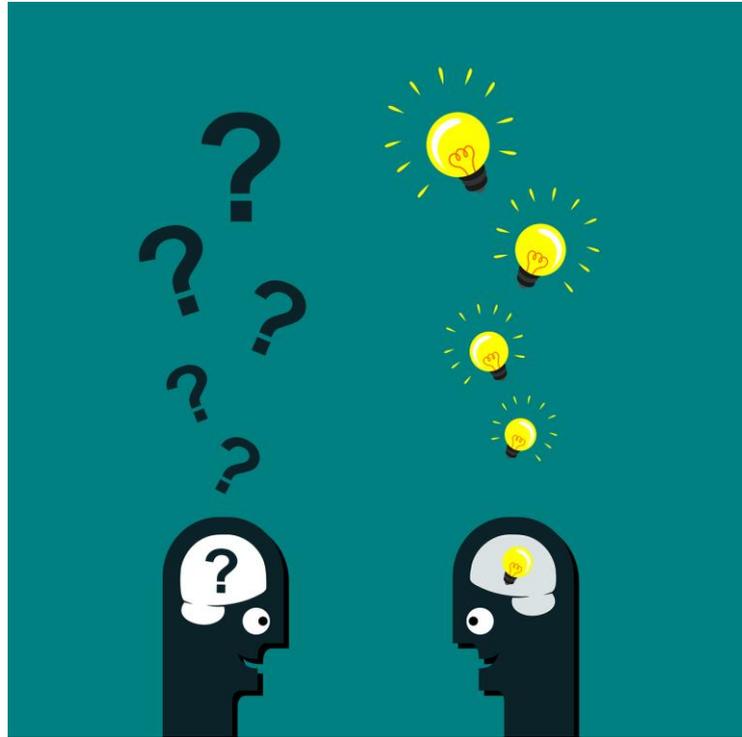
## Step 5: Refine the research question

- Does the America-based intervention lead to a reduction in DASS scores for anxiety over time in an Australian sample who self-identify as needing help with their AOD use

# Webinar summary

- Research questions help you define the scope, aims and direction of your research
- No right or wrong answers – the key is to make your research question as objective as possible
- Will the research question provide useful information? Is the research question realistic?

# Questions?



## Pictures

- <https://unsplash.com/>
- <https://pixabay.com/>

Q&A

# Contact us

- If you have any questions, please contact [info@cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au](mailto:info@cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au)

For more information about CMHDARN visit  
[cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au](http://cmhdaresearchnetwork.com.au)