



JOINT STATEMENT BY THE ACT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND OTHER DRUG (ATOD) AND MENTAL HEALTH (MH) ALLIANCE: ADDRESSING THE GAPS IN WORKFORCE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

April 2024

Preamble

The ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug (ATOD) and Mental Health (MH) Alliance (the Alliance) has identified important training areas for development across the ATOD and MH sectors. The Alliance recognises the importance of cross-sectoral workforce training to support people with co-occurring ATOD and MH conditions across the diverse range of treatment pathways and places where people access care.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Sector

- Under the ACT Alcohol and Other Drug Qualifications Strategy all specialist ACT ATOD services (funded by ACT Health) require relevant staff to successfully complete:
 - A qualification in ATOD or similar* which is equivalent to, or above, the Australian Qualifications Framework Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs (CHC43215); OR
 - A health, social, or behavioural science related tertiary (university) qualification plus the 'Alcohol and Other Drugs Skill Set'.
- The Certificate IV in ATOD comprises 12 non-ATOD units + the 4 units of the ATOD Skill Set.
 - Of the 12 non-ATOD units, 4 relate to mental health and/or co-occurring needs.
- Within the current ACT ATOD workforce there is a wealth of mental health experience, training and expertise.
 - The ACT Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Profile shows that alongside ATOD qualifications, workers are entering the sector with qualifications (up to and including postgraduate study) in areas such as psychology, counselling, mental health, community work, social work and youth work.
- Sector professional development is offered through ATODA and internally by individual services. Some professional development training for the ATOD sector includes training in MH and co-morbidities. In the past 12 months the following has been offered to the sector:
 - Mental Health First Aid
 - Suicide Prevention Training
 - Emotion Regulation: Skills for managing client distress
 - Responding to Alcohol and Other Drugs in Mental Health
 - Trauma Informed Practice
 - Responding to Comorbidity

*The ACT ATOD Qualifications Strategy refers to the disciplines ATOD and addiction studies.

- The University of Sydney's Matilda Centre offers online and face-to-face training in Managing co-occurring Alcohol and Other Drug and Mental Health Conditions to workers in the ATOD sector.

Mental Health Sector

- Dual diagnosis training for mental health workers is limited.
- The Certificate IV in Mental Health includes units and areas of study related to ATOD, as a core component of the qualification and as electives.
- The Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work reflects the role of workers who have mental health lived experience as either a consumer or carer and who work in mental health services in roles that support consumer peers or carer peers.
- The Certificate IV in Community Services includes training in both ATOD and MH, but treats them independently, rather than as co-occurring conditions.
- MH professional competencies, standards, and development tends to be siloed by profession and governed by a range of professional bodies. There are voluntary standards within the [National Safety and Quality Mental Health Standards for Community Managed Organisations](#) which includes workforce qualifications and skills, but these are general and do not have specifications around co-morbidity awareness and training.
- Mental Health Community Coalition ACT (MHCC) has offered training that covers ATOD and MH in the past (e.g. motivational interviewing, alcohol intervention training), but there is no established ongoing training that covers both areas.
- MHCC's ACT pre-Budget Submission, recommends incorporating MH and ATOD skillsets in the ACT Skills Needs List to ensure training is appropriately funded and supported.
- MH workforce training presents opportunities for incorporating concepts like harm minimisation and dignity of risk within models of care.

Broader workforce training considerations

- The MH and ATOD workforces should be trained to effectively work with diverse community groups that may experience higher prevalence and increased barriers from co-occurring ATOD and MH needs, including LGBTQIA+ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Many ATOD and MH workforce training models are content-based. It is important to ensure that people undertaking workforce development training are also adequately skilled in the human side of service delivery. This involves skills such as genuine empathy, listening and reflection, establishing trust, forming a connection and showing respect.
- The Alliance has developed a joint statement on the value of the peer workforce that recommends the ACT government explore pathways to formal qualifications for peer workers in the ATOD and MH sectors.

How the ACT government can further support MH and ATOD workforce training and development

The Alliance makes the following recommendations to the ACT government:

- Add the Mental Health Skill Set to the ACT Skills Needs List to ensure appropriately funded and supported training;
- Add the ATOD Skill Set to the ACT Skills Needs List to ensure appropriately funded and supported training; and
- Resource co-morbidity training within, or independent of, current training pathways, to address gaps in support for people with complex, co-occurring needs.

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