

1 Introduction

A National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) is a minimum set of data elements agreed by the National Health Information Management Group (NHIMG) for mandatory collection and reporting at the national level. A NMDS is contingent upon a national agreement to collect uniform data and supply it as part of a national collection, but does not preclude agencies and service providers from collecting additional data to meet their own specific needs (AIHW 2000a).

The NMDS for alcohol and other drug treatment services emanated from the national forum 'Treatment and Research—Where to From Here?' held in 1995 by the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA). Clinicians, researchers and government administrators attending the forum agreed that a lack of comparable data for alcohol and other drug treatment services was limiting the overall effectiveness of service provision. In response to this, the then Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services funded the first phase of the current NMDS project. The NMDS for alcohol and other drug treatment services has continued as a national project and, in December 1999, the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments through the NHIMG endorsed a version of the NMDS for collection to commence on 1 July 2000.

The NMDS will make it possible to compare and aggregate information nationally on drug-related problems, service utilisation and treatment programs for a variety of clients, population groups and service settings. It will provide agencies with access to basic data relating to particular types of clients, drug-related problems and treatment responses that are relevant to their own circumstances. The data derived from this national collection will be considered in conjunction with other information sources to inform debate, policy decisions and national strategies that occur within the alcohol and other drug treatment sector.

The NMDS will help in the evaluation, monitoring and reporting on the National Drug Strategic Framework 1998–99 to 2002–03 (see Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 1998) by:

- monitoring and reporting on the harms caused by drug use (e.g. the number of clients receiving treatment for a specific drug of concern);
- providing data that may be used for evaluating achievements against objectives and priority areas on treatment (e.g. access to treatment);
- informing evidence-based practice in treatment; and
- identifying emerging challenges and problems in the treatment sector (e.g. increasing client numbers in treatment for a specific drug of concern)

1.1 Aims of the report

The aims of this report are:

- to provide a brief historical account of the strategic context surrounding the need for national alcohol and other drug treatment services data;
- to provide an assessment of existing national data collections relating to alcohol and other drug treatment services;
- to outline the agreed NMDS for alcohol and other drug treatment services; and

- to provide information on work undertaken to date in developing the NMDS for alcohol and other drug treatment services, and to make recommendations for the future development of alcohol and other drug treatment services data.