

2 Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia

2.1 Background

In this report an agency or service provider that delivers alcohol and other drug treatment services is defined as one that offers one or more specialist treatment services to people with alcohol and/or other drug problems (Torres, Mattick, Chen & Baillie 1995). The range of treatment interventions covered by this definition is broad and includes detoxification and rehabilitation programs, therapeutic community programs, and pharmacological and psychological treatments. Using this definition, self-help groups, sobering-up centres, and services that provide only information, education, accommodation, and crisis interventions are not classified as specialist alcohol and other drug treatment agencies.

Research has indicated that drug treatment services are effective in reducing harmful drug use, hospital costs, drug-related crime, violence and welfare costs (Mattick & Hall 1993). The cost effectiveness of alcohol and other drug treatment services, and the benefits that can be obtained from early interventions conducted by suitably trained specialists have also been reported (see Single & Rohl 1997).

Alcohol and other drug treatment services are provided in a variety of settings, mainly through partnerships involving government and community-based organisations or the private sector (e.g. private medical clinics). The general aim is to match clients with an appropriate treatment option. Treatment services range from early, brief intervention designed to prevent someone progressing to harmful drug use, to long-term residential treatment designed to rehabilitate someone with an alcohol or drug dependence. The goals of treatment services can vary from complete abstinence to reduced or controlled use. In addition to helping people become drug free, such services can also offer other health benefits through drug substitution and reduction of harmful drug use and associated risk behaviour. Alcohol and other drug treatment services also work with other service providers to resolve additional health and social problems confronting their clients (Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 1998).

2.2 Treatment settings

Alcohol and other drug treatment providers may be publicly funded government or non-government agencies/organisations, or they may be privately funded. As mentioned above, alcohol and other drug treatment services are provided in a variety of settings and the main treatment settings are described below.

Hospital alcohol and other drug services

Most acute care hospitals provide specialist alcohol and other drug treatment services to admitted patients as part of hospital services. These services include detoxification and rehabilitation procedures and patients admitted for these purposes tend to have short-term

hospital stays. Hospital outpatient services may also provide alcohol and other drug treatment to clients.

Community-based alcohol and other drug residential treatment facilities

An alcohol and other drug residential treatment facility is a unit mainly engaged in the treatment, rehabilitation or harm reduction of alcohol or other drug dependence on a residential basis. Clients reside either temporarily or long-term in the facility, that is not their home or usual place of residence.

Community-based alcohol and other drug non-residential treatment facilities

A community-based alcohol and other drug non-residential treatment facility is a unit mainly engaged in the provision of acute or rehabilitative ambulatory or home care services for patients with alcohol or other drug dependencies. These units may also provide services through community clinics, and mobile and outreach services.

General community health centres

Community health centres are non-residential, centre-based units that are mainly engaged in providing a range of ambulatory health services, including public health services. They are not specialised alcohol and other drug treatment services, but may provide an alcohol and drug service as a component of the overall health centre program.

Outreach environment

Mobile/outreach alcohol and other drug treatment providers may engage clients in public (e.g. on the streets). An outreach environment can include any public or private location that is not a place where alcohol and other drug treatment services are normally provided.

2.3 Future developments

The *National Drug Strategic Framework 1998–99 to 2002–03* (Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 1998) has identified a number of future development priorities for alcohol and other drug treatment services:

- improving the range of services available;
- improving the effectiveness and quality of services;
- improving access to services and ensuring community acceptance of services including the development of services for specific population groups (e.g. young people, Indigenous people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds);
- increasing the involvement of mainstream service providers such as general practitioners and hospitals in early intervention and relapse prevention;
- building stronger links between drug treatment services and mental health care services; and
- improving access to treatment for people in the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems.

Progress in these areas relies on an effective partnership between government, community-based organisations and the private sector. The National Illicit Drug Strategy has recognised the need to target unmet demand and to encourage research that will examine the effectiveness of existing interventions and new treatment options (Ministerial Council on

Drug Strategy 1998). In response to this, the Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program provides funding for the establishment, expansion, upgrading and operation of non-government treatment services. The funding aims to strengthen the capacity of non-government organisations to achieve improved services and outcomes and to increase the number of treatment places available with a particular emphasis on filling identified geographic and target population gaps in the coverage of existing services. Following a national grant process, 133 projects were granted funding totalling \$57 million (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 2000).

Information development will play a central role in the future development of alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia. For evaluation, monitoring and reporting purposes, it is vital that information about the changing trends in harmful drug use and treatment demands be available to all levels of government, the alcohol and drug treatment sector and the wider community. The NMDS for alcohol and other drug treatment services will contribute significantly to the existing data sources that are presently available.