

Supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in screening and alcohol care

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Introduction and Aims: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ('Aboriginal') community controlled health services (ACCHSs) offer accessible and culturally secure care to communities. However there are many pressures on staff time and alcohol is a sensitive topic. We tested a model of service-wide support for screening and care for unhealthy alcohol use.

Design and Methods: Twenty-two ACCHSs took part; 11 received support early in the study (Early Support). The other 11 services acted as wait-list controls. Support included training; sharing of knowledge between services; and regular feedback of routinely collected data. We collected de-identified, routinely collected data from practice software. We analysed odds of a client being screened and of having brief intervention recorded over the first year of support (using multilevel logistic modelling).

Results: The services in both study arms increased their alcohol screening, but the odds of an individual being screened in any two-month period in an Early Support service was 5.5 times that of wait-list control services (Odds ratio (OR) 5.5; Confidence interval (CI) 4.31, 7.07). However we did not see a significant increase in recorded brief intervention (OR 2.06; CI 0.90, 4.69).

Discussions and Conclusions: This flexible support model built on sharing knowledge between services and on continuing quality improvement. Support helped services to increase alcohol screening as part of primary health care. More work is needed to support delivery (and/or recording) of brief intervention. Practice software provides a convenient way of collecting data, but potentially could also drive change in practices.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Flexible support for Aboriginal community controlled primary care services can build on their ability to engage community in culturally appropriate care. Practice software can play a role in monitoring implementation of clinical approaches, and potentially in supporting improvements.

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