

'The Work Won't Do Itself': a Critical Discussion of AOD Workforces

Authors: ANKE VAN DER STERREN¹, JULIE ROBERT¹, SUSAN HOLT², JANE MORETON³, DAVID TAYLOR³, SAM RAVEN⁴, SIANNE HODGE⁵

¹ Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT, Canberra, Australia, ² Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies, Perth, Australia, ³ Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, Melbourne, Victoria, ⁴ South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services, Adelaide, Australia, ⁵ Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies, Sydney, Australia

Presenter's emails: julie@atoda.org.au, susan.holt@wanada.org.au, jmoreton@vaada.org.au,

Chair: Anke van der Sterren, Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA), Canberra, Australia

Chair's email: anke@atoda.org.au

Aim: The aim of this symposium is to present and critically discuss the challenges, pathways and solutions to achieving a skilled and sustainable workforce in the alcohol and other drug sector.

PRESENTATION 1: Pathways to Recruiting and Retaining a Skilled Workforce: an Analysis of the ACT AOD Qualification Strategy using Workforce Profile Data

Presenting Authors: ANKE VAN DER STERREN¹, JULIE ROBERT¹

Introduction / Issues: Under the ACT Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) Qualification Strategy (QS), AOD services commit to supporting workers to access subsidised training to obtain and maintain the skills that are essential to being a well-rounded AOD worker. This presentation will investigate and discuss how the QS, since its development 15 years ago, has provided career pathways for the ACT AOD workforce, and how it must continue to evolve to best meet the future challenges facing the sector.

Method / Approach: Data for this presentation comes from the analysis of the ACT AOD Workforce Profiles from 2006 to 2021.

Key Findings: The Workforce Profile data demonstrates the success of the QS in providing pathways into the AOD sector for people with varying skill requirements:

- upskilling people with lived experience of AOD but limited access to education;
- providing people with non-AOD degrees a pathway to AOD-specific work; and
- supporting the workforce to attain the Certificate IV minimum qualification for employment in the AOD sector, including through student placements.

The further challenge for the ACT AOD sector, illuminated by this data, is in facilitating internal pathways to improved skills and capabilities and retaining a qualified, passionate and well workforce.

Discussions and Conclusions: While the ACT AOD Qualification Strategy continues to provide pathways for recruitment to, and retention within the ACT AOD sector, the Strategy should further evolve to meet the challenges identified in the Workforce Profile.

Implications for Practice or Policy (*optional*): The ACT is a dynamic AOD policy environment, with the potential decriminalisation of all drugs likely to lead to an increase in demand for specialist AOD services. This analysis of how the ACT AOD Qualification Strategy meets the current needs of the AOD workforce, and an understanding of future challenges is critical.

Disclosure of Interest: Nothing to disclose.

PRESENTATION 2: Workforce Planning and Leadership Initiatives in the Western Australian Non-government Alcohol and Other Drug Sector

Presenting Authors: SUSAN HOLT

Introduction / Issues: Population demand modelling has demonstrated a need to more than double the Western Australian (WA) alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector workforce by 2025. The impact of COVID-19 and the response planning further highlighted the need to expand the skilled workforce available to meet existing, projected and any surge demand. The WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) identified the need for a systemic approach and has commenced projects to address a range of barriers to achieve a sustainable AOD workforce.

Method / Approach:

WANADA contributed to the development of the WA Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Strategic Framework 2020-2025. Within this Strategic Framework WANADA is undertaking a number of relevant projects. Initiatives include workforce planning and work-readiness, promoting self-determination and AOD leadership strategies for First Nation peoples, and supporting peer career pathways and systemic advocacy.

Discussions and Conclusions:

The processes for progressing workforce initiatives requires considerable input from relevant sector representatives, and consultation with the sector and key collaborating partners to affect meaningful systems and practice change. The focus of this presentation is on those processes needed to address existing barriers and to achieve the desired outcomes of a sustainable workforce.

Disclosure of Interest: Nothing to disclose.

PRESENTATION 3: Workforce recruitment: identifying some of the challenges within the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) sectors in Victoria and South Australia

Presenting Authors: JANE MORETON, DAVID TAYLOR, SAM RAVEN

Introduction / Issues: Recruiting staff to alcohol and other drug sector roles is becoming increasingly difficult for treatment services. This is at a time when workforce capacity is also being impacted by shifts in policy initiatives such as family violence and mental health reform, and COVID-19.

Method / Approach: Sector surveys of the Victorian sector undertaken by VAADA in 2019, October 2020 and January 2021. Informal consultations with SANDAS members in 2020 & 2021.

Key Findings: The 2019 VAADA survey identified recruitment as being the most prevalent challenge affecting treatment services. Subsequent surveys indicated that during COVID the

demand for AOD services substantially increased, with between 2,385 and 2,427 individuals on agency wait-lists on any given day.

SANDAS members identified workforce development a primary challenge due to a number of barriers including stigma associated with AOD work, a lack of educational pathways and limited resourcing for service delivery and ongoing workforce development.

Discussions and Conclusions: In response to the increased demand the Victorian Department of Health has at this stage made funding available to Victorian AOD services to recruit 100 new positions. Additional funding for staff is a welcome response to increased demand, however other barriers to recruitment will hinder this process if not addressed. These include a lack of availability of suitably qualified staff, aging workforce, lack of access to affordable/funded competency-based training and competition with other related sectors such as mental health and family violence which offer higher remuneration rates. Nationally, the workforce is experiencing ongoing attrition and unless recruitment barriers are addressed, the sector is heading towards a workforce crisis in coming years.

Disclosure of Interest: Nothing to disclose.

PRESENTATION 4: Development of a Workforce Capability Framework for the NSW Non Government Alcohol and other Drugs Sector

Presenting Authors: SIANNE HODGE

Introduction / Issues: Central to workforce performance are capabilities—the knowledge, skills and attributes that workers must demonstrate to perform their roles effectively. Developed for, and with input from those who work in the alcohol and other drugs sector (AOD), the 2020 ‘Workforce Capability Framework: Core capabilities for the NSW non government alcohol and other drugs sector’ (WCF) describes the core capabilities and associated behaviours expected of all NSW non government AOD workers.

Method / Approach: The WCF is the result of an extensive consultation and development process that included a workforce survey, desktop review, and group consultation workshop.

Key Findings: Non government AOD workers come from a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds and operate in a wide range of roles and practice settings yet require similar capabilities. In particular, there are 27 capabilities that are relevant to NSW non government AOD workers which we have organised into six areas of professional responsibility (‘domains’). Of these, five domains apply to all workers in the sector, and one domain applies just to workers providing AOD treatment and interventions.

Discussions and Conclusions: The WCF establishes a common language and shared understanding of what AOD workers are expected to be capable of doing, in order to do their work efficiently, effectively and appropriately. It provides a common foundation for the full range of workforce development activities: workforce planning; role design and description; recruitment and selection; performance management; professional development and career planning.

Discussion Section: This symposium aims to present and critically discuss the challenges, pathways and solutions to achieving a skilled and sustainable workforce in the alcohol and other drug sector.

In the context of increasing demand for a skilled workforce, the symposium will present attendees with an opportunity to engage in a critical discussion to identify key strategic opportunities to improve recruitment and retention into the AOD workforce. Although the presentations will present the challenges faced, they will highlight approaches being taken by AOD peak organisations across multiple jurisdictions to: build workforce capacity; recruit workers from a range of backgrounds and across a range of disciplines; build leadership; and support retention of the workforce. The symposium will also highlight the agility and adaptability of the workforce to quickly changing circumstances, such as has occurred with COVID-19.

Discussant: Chair: Anke van der Sterren, Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA), Canberra, Australia

Discussant's email: anke@atoda.org.au

Disclosure of Interest Statement: No disclosure of interests from any of the authors