

## Peer Work in the Age of COVID: The SESLHD Drug and Alcohol Service Experience

### Authors:

SOPHIE MAIOLO<sup>1</sup>, GARRY BELL<sup>1</sup>, VERONICA GANORA<sup>1</sup>, LOUISA JANSEN<sup>1</sup>, ANDREW MCDONELL<sup>1</sup>, BEN STEELE<sup>1</sup>, KATHLEEN SUTHERLAND<sup>1</sup>, BRENDAN CROZIER<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *South Eastern Sydney Local Health District Drug and Alcohol Service, Sydney, Australia.*

Presenter's email: [brendan.crozier@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:brendan.crozier@health.nsw.gov.au)

**Background:** The role of the Peer Worker at Drug and Alcohol Services (DAS) in South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) during COVID-19 was challenging and required innovative strategies to maintain contact. Our clients' main concerns were daily medication and staying 'COVID safe'. For some clients their only contact with people is when they attend the clinic. We aimed to continue provide support in a 'COVID-safe way'.

**Description of Model of Care/Intervention:** In 2020, realising we needed to implement different strategies to maintain client engagement, we began daily check-ups via SMS or call with clients. We used our innovation and passed coffee through the windows instead of hosting our drop-in coffee mornings inside. There was a greater need for looking after client welfare, with food vouchers and housing information. A broader change in the model of care for the Opiate Treatment Program (increased use of 'take-aways' and moving to community pharmacy) required increased support. We continued to provide education, support, and linkage with services. All of these assisted with client engagement in a crucial time.

**Effectiveness:** In April-May 2019 Peer Workers provided a total of 255 interactions with clients. During the same period in 2020 we provided 545 interactions, and in April-May 2021 we provided 406 interactions.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** Despite reduced activity in other parts of clinical services, we continued to provide support on all aspects of care. Interactions with Peer Workers increased during COVID19, reflecting the success of our ability to pivot towards providing more COVID-safe services.

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