

## **INVESTING IN THE CONSUMER WORKFORCE IMPROVES THE ENGAGEMENT OF CLIENTS IN DRUG AND ALCOHOL (D&A) TREATMENT SERVICES.**

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**Introduction / Issues:** Having a lived experience as a consumer of a drug and alcohol service is essential criteria for becoming a Consumer Representative at South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) D&A Service, however, that alone does not prepare that person to deal with the realities of the job. Consumer Representatives must function at a level where they provide quality care to clients, communicate effectively with multidisciplinary teams and remain vigilant about their own self-care needs.

**Method / Approach:** Consumer Representatives require ongoing training and development to effectively engage with clients. Training to improve understanding of drug & alcohol, other health and social welfare issues and health coaching all improve the representative's understanding and response to the needs of the clients.

Training in consumer advocacy and purposeful story telling enables representatives to appropriately represent D&A Consumers at various in-house meetings, District Governance committees, and the Ministry of Health AOD Consumer Committee.

Attendance at conferences such as APSAD, NUAA Peers & Consumer Forum and the Patient Experience Symposium promotes a broader understanding of issues relating to the field and provide an opportunity for networking.

Participating in Reflective Practice further develops the representative's skills and promotes their wellbeing.

**Key Findings:** From Jan 2019- April 2019 representatives successfully provided 188 episodes of peer support; 22 information/resources to clients; assisted 25 family/carers; made 71 external referrals and 38 internal referrals. Representatives also received 19 referrals from clinical staff.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Investing in the development of Consumer Representatives in D&A Services enables greater engagement of clients and care planning. It also increases staff retention, minimises burnout, and establishes a viable career path.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** Nil