

“You learn about stigma when you start treatment” – Health workforce attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards people experiencing harm from alcohol and other drugs

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Introduction: Many people experiencing harm from alcohol and other drugs (AOD) use experience negative attitudes and sub-optimal outcomes when seeking health services. To respond at a systemic level, the NSW Ministry of Health and partners commissioned market segmentation research to understand the attitudes, values and behaviours of NSW Health staff in the AOD sector (including NGOs), Mental Health, Emergency Departments and Maternity services; and to design an initial response.

Method: Formative research included small group discussions with consumer representatives, service providers and NSW Ministry of Health staff and a rapid review of effective approaches to addressing health workforce stigma and discrimination. A quantitative survey of healthcare workers (HCWs), underpinned by theories of behaviour change, then collated 323 responses via an online survey. The Capability, Opportunity, Motivation and Behaviour (COM-B) model and the Theoretical Domains Framework were used to analyse data from the mixed-methods approach and identify effective avenues for intervention.

Key Findings: Analysis identified six psychographic segment profiles based on survey responses that generally suggested in NSW:

- the three segments comprising primarily HCW in publicly funded or NGO AOD services were less likely to hold stigmatising attitudes and beliefs, have increased AOD skill capability, and motivation for change.
- the remaining three segments including HCW in Community Outpatient, Emergency Department and Mental Health services were more likely to hold stigmatising attitudes and beliefs, have reduced AOD skill capacity, and reduced motivation for change.

Discussions and Conclusions: These six segments provide a framework to target strategies to influence HCW behavior based on their particular characteristics, further supported by necessary policy and practice change.

Implications for Practice or Policy: This research provides a foundational understanding of HCW attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards people experiencing harm from AOD use and suggests mechanisms for intervention at a policy, clinical practice and organisational level.

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