Playing Research Cupid: Prioritising and implementing research and evaluation with policymakers, academics, clinicians and consumers using a co-creative approach

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Introduction: The NSW Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs developed the NSW Ministry of Health Strategic Prioritisation Framework for Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Research and Evaluation: 2020-24 with the objectives of:
1. Driving research partnerships between NSW Health and external stakeholders;
2. Maximising returns on research investment;
3. Identifying strategic evidence gaps aligned to NSW Government policies and priorities; and
4. Translating research into practice.

Approach: Stakeholders (n=50) covering NSW Government Agencies, academia, clinicians, NGOs and consumers attended a December 2019 cross-sector workshop to identify and prioritise knowledge and evidence gaps and priorities:
1) Aligned to the current state-wide context of NSW priorities and recommendations from enquiries and inquests;
2) Consistent with established research prioritisation criteria; and/or
3) Answerable through the analysis of existing public health data.

Outcomes: The published Framework identified five strategic priority areas:
1) AOD-related mortality;
2) Evaluating current models of care;
3) Health system access and patient journey;
4) Improving AOD services for priority populations; and
5) Prevention and early intervention.
The priorities are being progressed through stakeholder working groups that identify appropriate research and evaluation questions and activities, as well as partnerships and funding opportunities.

Discussion: The Framework's four objectives have been achieved. Research and evaluation projects aligned with the framework have been initiated within the first six months of its launch with significant support from across the AOD sector. As one example, the first three working groups are directing analysis of an AOD Public Health Register by UNSW and USYD to answer policy questions around mortality, service gaps and consumer treatment journeys. These projects will drive innovation and improve health outcomes for people experiencing AOD related harms.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional)**:** Improved alignment between research and policy needs whereby findings are translated directly into practice ensuring evidence-informed practice and policy.

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