Rural Northwest Health case study

Initial needs identification of people with chronic conditions

The Chronic Care Model element highlighted in this case study is delivery system design. Providing effective care for chronic conditions requires a multidisciplinary team-based approach.

Background

The Wimmera region of Victoria is a predominately rural area with a high proportion of older people and high levels of chronic conditions such as diabetes, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Rural Northwest Health has three campuses across the region that provide a comprehensive range of acute, aged, and primary health services to the local community.

A few years ago Rural Northwest Health looked at how their services aligned with the department’s Community Health Indicators. They identified that they needed to improve the way consumers enter and access their service – especially people with chronic and complex conditions.

What they did

The community health team met monthly, and with the support of the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership, used the Plan, Do, Study, Act model for improvement to review their intake process.

The team identified that:

- more people with chronic conditions were accessing the service, and it was becoming increasingly demanding to prioritise client appointments, manage waiting lists and coordinate appointments
- to improve the service they needed to identify a person’s needs at intake to direct consumers to the most appropriate service at the right time, especially if there was a waiting list

First, intake trialled the Service Coordination Tools and Templates (SCCT) single-page screener for health and social needs to identify a person’s broad health needs.

However after trialling, intake changed to using the Health and Chronic Conditions screener, as it better reflects and captures the needs of the consumers who present at Rural Northwest Health.

Everyone referred to Rural Northwest Health is contacted by the intake coordinator before their first appointment, and the screening is undertaken by phone.

The new intake process has provided people with a way of indicating what they feel their health issues and needs are, and they are supported and empowered to participate in their initial needs identification process.

The process also provides the intake worker with opportunities to provide information and early intervention, and it informs the urgency and type of assessments required.

The need for services other than those the person was originally referred for are often identified through the process and referrals are often made to other services such as counselling while the person is placed on a waiting list to access their original referral for service – such as physiotherapy or podiatry.

The new intake model and screening process provides a strong foundation for developing a care plan for people with a chronic condition or who have complex needs.
The Health and Chronic Conditions screening tool enables the team to determine the appropriate key worker and share the client’s information with other team members.

The team now convenes a fortnightly care coordination meeting and is working on improving their care planning processes.

**Outcomes**

Rural Northwest Health clinicians have indicated they feel the process is providing benefits for people with chronic conditions, people are able to access services that they may not have considered and therefore care now has an improved holistic and preventive approach.

Staff feel the process supports them with what can sometimes be difficult conversations with clients about the need for certain services like dietetics, social work and counselling, as the client is made aware of these options through the initial needs identification process in a non-judgemental or invasive way.

Feedback from clients about the process has been positive and the process has helped the organisation to identify incorrect referrals – people are now directed to the services they need – saving time, reducing frustration and increasing efficiency.

The extra emphasis on an efficient initial needs identification process has also assisted Rural Northwest Health to manage demand for services.