

Communique: Intake and assessment transition and implementation plan

Transition to new alcohol and other drug treatment system intake and assessment arrangements

On Friday 16 December 2016, the Department of Health and Human Services announced changes to the alcohol and other drug treatment system to improve access for clients.

Consistent with directions identified in the Aspex Review, responsibility for conducting comprehensive assessment and treatment planning will move from intake providers to treatment providers. This change will allow alcohol and other drug treatment providers to conduct assessments as the first stage in developing therapeutic relationships with clients.

The department is working closely with the sector to progress implementation of these changes over the coming months. This communique outlines activities that the department is undertaking to support the sector to transition to the new arrangements. These activities have been developed following consultation with the sector across January and February 2017.

Timing

The new arrangements will **begin on 1 July 2017**, with several key steps to occur to enable the transition. This date has been chosen in consultation with the sector.

Service providers emphasised the importance of providing certainty, consistency across the state and sufficient notice before the changes are due to commence.

Consultation

The department has taken a flexible and consultative approach to developing appropriate transition support, and has worked closely with affected providers to understand risks and issues that may arise during the implementation of the change.

On 17 January and 3 February 2017, the department held forums with adult community-based alcohol and other drug treatment providers and sector reference group members to discuss the timing of the changes and develop transitional arrangements to support the sector during the change process.

The department also met individually with all current alcohol and other drug intake providers to discuss opportunities for the department to assist these organisations in the transition.

Further, to support a smooth transition in regional and rural areas, the department hosted five rural alcohol and other drug provider workshops in February 2017. The purpose of these workshops was to facilitate discussion of any issues relating to the changes specific to each area, with the aim of reaching agreed local approaches and solutions. The workshops were held in Traralgon, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Wangaratta.

Communication and sector engagement

The department's alcohol and other drug website will be regularly refreshed to provide up-to-date information on the transition to new arrangements, and clarity about the intake and assessment functions. Further information is available from <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/aod-treatment-services/community-based-aod-treatment/adult-community-based-aod-service-review/>.

Further, the Alcohol and Other Drug Program Guidelines, previously released to the sector as a consultation draft, will be published in April 2017. These guidelines will clarify the department's expectations and requirements of funded services, and will include an overview of the intake and assessment functions and requirements.

Information will be provided on the scope and target group of intake services, priority populations and referral pathways, including interfaces between services and entry points across the service system. The Program Guidelines will provide more definitive information to the sector on a number of questions about intake and assessment that were raised during the consultation process.

Throughout the transition period, the department will communicate regularly with funded providers, primarily through departmental regional managers, via communiques, targeted emails, electronic newsletters and website updates. Monthly updates will be distributed via email with updates on progress and ongoing answers to additional FAQs received.

Screening and assessment tool refresh

To support the new arrangements, the adult AOD screening and assessment tools will be refreshed. This will ensure that they are fit for purpose, given the new intake and assessment arrangements, and effectively support clinician decision-making. The department has engaged Turning Point to undertake this work in consultation with the sector, which will also include developing a refreshed clinician guide, an online orientation to the refreshed tools and workforce training to support staff to use the new tools.

The refreshed tools and clinician guide will be finalised by 30 April 2017. From May, workshops will be held across Victoria to support staff to use the refreshed intake and assessment tools.

Turning Point has begun consultation on the tools, and providers are encouraged to contribute so that the refreshed tools better meet the needs of clients.

For more information, please contact Nyssa Fergusson, Turning Point on 9412 9952 or email Research@turningpoint.org.au.

Workforce development

The intake and assessment changes present an opportunity for treatment staff to refresh or broaden their skills to support clients. The department has recently undertaken a workforce survey to determine the size, distribution and features of the alcohol and other drug sector, including skill levels and qualifications and factors that influence work satisfaction in the sector.

To support a smooth transition to the new service delivery arrangements, the department is further investing in a range of workforce development activities to understand staff skills and build staff confidence and capability to deliver to the new arrangements. These include:

- Sector consultation to determine training needs linked to intake and assessment
- Workshops across alcohol and other drug catchments and an online orientation to support staff to use the refreshed intake and assessment tools, as noted above
- Targeted workshops to support staff to further develop the clinical skills needed for effective intake and assessment, including bridging support and brief interventions.

Workforce transition

There will be no change to the total amount of funding available to the sector as part of these changes, and the skilled alcohol and other drugs workforce will continue to be in high demand. The department's early engagement with the sector has been focussed on retaining the expertise of current staff conducting comprehensive assessments to support a smooth transition.

It is clear that the impact of the changes will be felt differentially across catchments and providers. The department has heard that providers will manage the transition process in different ways, with some providers expecting to experience no or minimal impact on staffing, and others advising that staff movement within organisations, consortia or catchments may be required to ensure continuity of service provision. Consortia lead providers have been asked to work collaboratively with their consortia members and other organisations to support any necessary staff movements throughout the transition.

To further support staff retention in the sector, particularly in rural areas, the department will facilitate a process of information sharing in March 2017. Details regarding the location and qualifications of affected staff located in current intake and assessment providers will be shared with the treatment provider organisations in the relevant geographic area that are taking on the assessment function.

The aim of this process is to enable staff seeking employment to be made aware of opportunities in other organisations. This is a voluntary process and affected staff will remain anonymous. It will be open to treatment providers taking on the assessment function to contact intake providers to learn more about staff seeking employment in each catchment, and to promote job opportunities to interested staff.

It is important to note that recruitment and industrial relations matters will remain the responsibility of individual treatment providers, though collaboration is encouraged to enable staff transition where possible.

Local flexibility

The intake and assessment changes present an opportunity for consortia and providers within catchments to identify opportunities to collaborate at local level on service delivery, workforce and client pathways.

Providers are encouraged to continue catchment-level conversations on how the arrangements can best work at a local level. Several consortia (working with intake providers) have already put in place innovative models and collaborative processes that best meet the needs of the local area.

Transition monitoring

During transition, the department's primary focus is on ensuring stability and service continuity, so clients continue to get the help they need. We are confident this can be achieved if everyone works together.

The department has committed to closely monitor the implementation process to ensure service continuity for clients and to reduce the likelihood of unintended consequences, such as increases in wait times or inappropriate referrals to treatment services.

Departmental regional managers are being supported to engage with providers at a local level, and will be the main point of contact for providers, including to provide advice and to monitor the transition process through regular interactions with service providers.

Individual service providers are encouraged to engage with departmental regional managers throughout the transition to provide feedback on the change process and to discuss any adjustments that can be made at a local level to support the change.

After the reforms have had time to bed down, the department will review whether the funding allocations for the assessment and intake functions continues to be appropriate to support the new arrangements.

As the impact of the changes will be felt differentially across catchments and providers, the department will be taking a flexible approach to transition support and monitoring, engaging through regional managers to understand any significant impacts that might be felt at a local level. Transition support responses will then be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specific context and need for stability and service continuity.

Adult Community-Based Alcohol and Other Drug Sector Reference Group

At recent transition consultation forums, alcohol and other drug service providers supported that the Adult Community-Based Alcohol and Other Drug Sector Reference Group continue to meet during 2017 to oversee ongoing progress in responding to the Aspx Review.

In 2017, the Sector Reference Group will meet at the following times:

- Tuesday 28 March 2017, 1:30pm – 4:30pm, Room 3+4 Jasper Hotel, 489 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne
- Monday 24 July 2017, 1:00pm – 4:00pm, Room 1.10, Level 1, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne
- Wednesday 25 October 2017, 1:30pm – 4:30pm, Room 1.10, Level 1, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

At the first meeting in March 2017, the Sector Reference Group will be asked to consider whether any additional, specific arrangements should be established to support the transition to the new arrangements.

The Sector Reference Group will also be invited to provide ongoing feedback to the department about the transition process, including any issues arising that require consideration.

Further information about the Sector Reference Group including the terms of reference and membership are available from <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/aod-treatment-services/community-based-aod-treatment/adult-community-based-aod-service-review>

Next steps

The department is keen to continue to work closely with the sector to ensure the transition to the new arrangements progresses smoothly, including monitoring for issues arising.

Key next steps for the department and service providers are:

- The department will provide formal written notice to funded providers to confirm the revised service delivery arrangements and associated funding and targets to take effect from the 2017-18 financial year. This advice will be provided as soon as possible, at least three months in advance of the changes commencing.
- Providers are strongly encouraged to work together at a consortia and catchment level to determine local transition arrangements. It is the responsibility of consortia leads to share information and updates with their consortia member organisations and lead planning for transition at the consortia level.
- The department will facilitate the transfer of workforce information in selected rural catchments to support the retention of qualified and experienced staff in the sector.
- The department will be providing regular updates on the transition, and other projects underway that support these changes, to the sector via a range of media including the health.vic.gov.au website, newsletters and VAADA E-News. The department will also look to harness existing forums, such as the Change Agent Network and communities of practice, to aid the flow of information.
- Departmental regional contacts are meeting individually with providers, in particular those who will be gaining assessment responsibilities, to discuss the changes and prepare for transition. The department will continue to monitor the transition process, and providers are encouraged to provide feedback to regional contacts about their experience of the transition process.
- The Sector Reference Group will meet on Tuesday 28 March 2017 to discuss and provide advice on the implementation of the changes to intake and assessment, and any specific arrangements that may be required to support the transition.

Questions

The department is committed to strong, ongoing engagement with the sector during the transition process.

If you have any questions at this stage, please don't hesitate to email AOD.enquiries@dhhs.vic.gov.au or talk to your departmental regional contacts.

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Available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/aod-treatment-services/community-based-aod-treatment/adult-community-based-aod-service-review>