

Measuring Outcomes: A forum for peer support services

Program & discussion summary

The Centre of Excellence in Peer Support forum held on Monday, 25 March was designed to create dialogue between services about best practice approaches to outcome measurement. Participants were provided the opportunity to explore common challenges with experienced peer workers, leaders and colleagues, and to think about how we can effectively capture the impacts that peer support has on recovery.

A range of speakers presented their work and ideas around the use of outcome measures in the peer support context:

- Louise Alexander, [GROW](#) Branch Manager (Victoria/Tasmania) presented an overview of the use of outcome measures for mental health Mutual Support and Self Help services in Victoria in the context of current state wide and national mental health reforms. A copy of Louise's overview including research references will be made available for download via the CEPS website soon.
- Dominic Hwang and Craig Wallace presented their work in evaluating the pilot program of a structured, 8-week peer-led recovery program at [Inner South Community Health Service](#), including the rationale for implementing a triangulation mixed research method.
- Bev Hamilton, Funding Agreement Manager for the Disability, Mental Health and Housing division of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs ([FaHCSIA](#)) presented an overview of the Targeted Community Care Program, with a particular emphasis on Personal Helpers and Mentors ([PHaMs](#)) and the role of peer support workers in this program.
- Jason Henham, Managing Director of [Slate Consulting](#) discussed the imperative of outcome measurements for thriving organisations.

A panel discussion between speakers and guests followed the presentations, before general group discussions were facilitated to explore the barriers and supports for implementing effective evaluation and outcome measurement processes for peer support programs. Key themes of these discussions are outlined below.

Greater understanding of evaluation processes and outcome measurement tools specific to peer support programs was identified as a high priority need throughout the discussions. The challenges to implementing evaluations were recognised in terms of resources (time, skills and budget constraints), as well as the issue of accessing measurement tools that effectively capture the impact of a broad range of models and programs. Cultural validity and sensitivity of current tools was also noted as a barrier to effective measurement for CALD and ATSI peer support services.

Several factors were highlighted as being supportive, to enable improved outcome measurement practice across services. Primarily, managerial support was seen as a key factor, including the provision of training for undertaking evaluative processes; the Inner South Community Health Service in-house training for staff was recognised as a valuable example of this type of support. Availability of frameworks for establishing program evaluations including information about effective measurement instruments was also noted as being of need. The Centre of Excellence in Peer Support will endeavor to identify such frameworks, and make them available for download from the CEPS online resources database.

Discussion of proposed improvements centered on workforce development and engaging organisations to be supportive of, and well-equipped for, evaluation processes. A key enabler for this development was identified as developing the community of workers and services to pool their evaluation knowledge. It was also suggested that regular meetings for continuing to share ideas may be of benefit. Collaborative research and evaluation projects between service providers and academic institutions received significant support, and the current research project being undertaken by Voices Vic in conjunction with the Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre was recognised as a positive development in this area.

Finally, it was noted that in the context of such perceived challenges, it is important to maintain a perspective of evaluation and outcome measures as being supportive of peer support programs, and conducive to their continued improvement.



Centre of Excellence in Peer Support:

www.peersupportvic.org

Email: peer.support@arafemi.org.au

Telephone: 1300 237 199