

Student Placements Making an Impact

WA Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agency's (WANADA) student placement program was developed initially to provide allied health students with experience in the alcohol and other drug sector. The program has diversified to include generalist health students including those from medical, pharmacy and paramedic disciplines. A primary aim of these placements is to address common attitudes associated with alcohol and other drug users among health professionals.

It has long been recognised that a significant barrier to receiving optimal health care, for people impacted by alcohol and other drug use, is stigma. A lack of knowledge of alcohol and other drugs, and the resulting lack of confidence in working with alcohol and other drug users potentially contributes to real or perceived discrimination.^{1 2 3}

WANADA's Comprehensive Alcohol and other Drug Workforce Development in Western Australia Report, (2017), identified limited training on alcohol and other drugs in a range of relevant tertiary courses. As a result, the sector has identified that graduating students are not adequately work-ready, to work in or with the specialist alcohol and other drug sector. Better preparing students to work with people impacted by alcohol and other drugs will enhance their work readiness, as well as reduce the burden on the sector - which is stretched to capacity in an environment of increasing demand for limited services to meet community needs.⁴

WANADA in collaboration with member services and tertiary institutions provides a unique student placement experience. The placements contribute to the alcohol and other drug sector workforce in their delivery of holistic approaches to treatment by building capabilities of future health professionals. WANADA believes this program contributes to better outcomes for people impacted by alcohol and other drugs.

WANADA's Student Placement Model

From July 2018 to September 2019 WANADA collaborated with six disciplines from five Australian universities to place 52 students into seven alcohol and other drug services across eight sites (see Appendix A).

WANADA's student placement model relies on a collaboration with tertiary institutions, WANADA's member services and other stakeholders. By working in collaboration, WANADA facilitates placements at services that otherwise would not have the capacity to support students.

WANADA's roles in the placement program includes:

- working with services and universities to identify suitable projects that meet service needs while also meeting required learning outcomes;
- providing a comprehensive induction/introduction to the alcohol and other drug sector;
- coordinating required supervision and collaborative assessments;
- assisting with project planning; and
- undertaking post placement evaluation with students, member services and relevant stakeholders.

Evaluations include student pre- and post-placement assessments of attitudes towards working with people impacted by alcohol and other drug use. To date significant shifts have been identified.

¹ National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), (2006). *Health Professionals' Attitudes Towards Licit and Illicit Drug Users: A Training Resource*. Retrieved from <http://nceta.flinders.edu.au/files/7712/5548/2203/EN150.pdf>

² Lancaster, K., Seear, K., & Ritter, A. (2017). *Reducing stigma and discrimination for people experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use. A report for the Queensland Mental Health Commission*. Retrieved from: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/Reducing%20stigma%20and%20discrimination%20for%20people%20experiencing%20problematic%20alcohol%20and%20other%20drug%20use.pdf>

³ McCann, T.V., Savic, M., Ferguson, N., Bosley, E., Smith, K., Roberts L., ...Lubman, D.I. (2018). Paramedics' perceptions of their scope of practice in caring for patients with non-medical emergency-related mental health and/or alcohol and other drug problems: A qualitative study. *PLoS ONE* 13(12). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208391>

⁴ Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA), (2017). *Comprehensive Alcohol and other Drug Workforce Development in Western Australia*. Western Australian Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (WANADA), Perth.

Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma and discrimination associated with alcohol and other drug dependence is pervasive. The perception that alcohol and other drug dependence is an act of personal choice rather than a medical condition frequently underlies stigma and discrimination. Negative attitudes towards alcohol and other drug users is prevalent among health and welfare workers and is often reinforced by communication and institutional structures within service provision.⁵

Research undertaken at one Australian University indicated that paramedic, nursing and health science students had the lowest regard for people with alcohol and other drug related conditions when compared to people with an intellectual disability and acute mental illness.⁶ Stigma is a “fundamental social cause of health inequalities”⁷ leading to increased stress, delayed help seeking, premature termination of treatment, and a decreased likelihood of seeking treatment again.

Not only does stigma impact treatment delivery, many alcohol and other drug users, interviewed about their experiences with health care, reported that negative experiences with health care workers triggered further alcohol and other drug use to cope with feelings of shame and powerlessness. Promisingly, a number of interventions have successfully reduced stigma associated with alcohol and other drug use, such as:

- education and training across a range of disciplines;
- increased contact with people in alcohol and other drug services;
- peer workers in health settings; and
- holistic approaches to treatment that focus on the person.⁸

WANADA’s placement opportunities incorporate many of the above-mentioned interventions.

WANADA offers reflective/experiential learning placements specifically for pharmacy and paramedic students.

Regional pharmacy student placements at a therapeutic community

WANADA has facilitated a strong collaboration between the Western Australian Centre for Rural Health (WACRH) and Hope Springs Farm in Geraldton to support pharmacy student placements from across Australia (see Appendix A). The pharmacy students have a unique opportunity to share a rural placement experience.

Analyses of a six-month sample of selected pharmacy students’ evaluations indicated a positive change in attitude. Students were:

- more likely to disagree with the statement that “people who use alcohol and other drugs cause their own problems”;
- more confident working with people who experience harms related to their alcohol and other drug use;
- more compassionate towards people who experience harms related to their alcohol and other drug use.

Selective comments from pharmacy placement students are listed below.

I learnt patience, empathy and got to experience being in a professional environment.

I learnt to respect their stories and challenge my opinions.

I now have a greater understanding of why some people use drugs in the first place. I have more empathy.

⁵ Lancaster, K., Seear, K., & Ritter, A. (2017). *Reducing stigma and discrimination for people experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use. A report for the Queensland Mental Health Commission*. Retrieved from: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/Reducing%20stigma%20and%20discrimination%20for%20people%20experiencing%20problematic%20alcohol%20and%20other%20drug%20use.pdf>

⁶ Boyle, M., Williams, B., Brown, T., Molloy, A., McKenna, L., Molloy, E., & Lewis, B. (2010). Attitudes of undergraduate health science students towards patients with intellectual disability, substance abuse, and acute mental illness: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Medical Education*, 10(71). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19591059>

⁷ Hatzenbuehler, M.L., Phelan, J.C., & Link, B.G. (2013). Stigma as a fundamental cause of population health inequalities. *American Journal of Public Health* 103(5), 819. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3682466/>

⁸ Lancaster, K., Seear, K., & Ritter, A. (2017). *Reducing stigma and discrimination for people experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use. A report for the Queensland Mental Health Commission*. Retrieved from: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/Reducing%20stigma%20and%20discrimination%20for%20people%20experiencing%20problematic%20alcohol%20and%20other%20drug%20use.pdf>

I am better able to confidently relate to people from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Feedback from collaborating partners includes:

Student placements are great. We learn as much from them as they do from us. They bring a fresh *perspective and new energy to the farm...* They are also a prosocial role-model for residents. (Hope Springs Farm's Therapeutic Lead)

Hope Springs Farm placements are a stand out *for the students, they love it.... And they get a lot out of it.* (Rural Pharmacy Liaison Officer, WACRH)

Paramedic student placements at a peer-based harm reduction service

Australian paramedics report increasing call outs for alcohol and other drug/mental health related emergencies and that they are not adequately trained to deal with these issues.⁹ A new and exciting partnership with Edith Cowan University's (ECU) Paramedicine and Peer Based Harm Reduction Western Australia (PBHRWA) has given rise to a systematic approach to paramedic student placements in a peer run alcohol and other drug harm reduction service.

Through the process of WANADA coordinating paramedic student placements, PBHRWA now provides education on alcohol and other drug issues on site and at ECU. There was overwhelming interest from paramedic students in both the education and training and the two-week WANADA supported placements.

Paramedic students' post placement evaluations showed reduced stigma, increased interest in working with the alcohol and other drug sector, and increased confidence in working with people impacted by alcohol and other drugs.

Selective comments from paramedic placement students are listed below.

Long term, I think that the placements have the opportunity to reduce the stigma shown by health care professionals towards consumers - which remains a critical barrier to accessing health services *by consumers...* I believe my capacity to treat consumers with fairness and compassion in my future career has increased.

It felt like I was talking to a professional with personal experience. It changed my perception of *alcohol and other drug using consumers...* I used to think *'they shouldn't be doing that'*, now I understand that they are *using coping options...* There are many things I can do to cope - what options does a homeless person have?... I am now an advocate for these placements.

I heard about people begging not to have an ambulance called. People perceive paramedics as having a level of knowledge about alcohol and other drugs, *but we don't.* I will be better able to work together with alcohol and other drug using consumers and advocate for them.

Feedback from collaborating partners includes:

I feel I have experienced large gains in the alcohol and other drug area, professionally, with being able to build strong and credible partnerships with both PBHRWA and WANADA. I have a better understanding of the alcohol and other drug sector and the community programs available. I now have an understanding of the need to collaborate with organisations.... These placements are bridging the gaps highlighted in recent research published about paramedics and the alcohol and other drug sector - and students get real life exposure to this environment, rather than simulation or theory. (Paramedical Clinical Coordinator, ECU.)

The placements challenged me to think differently... They tackle stigma... I feel like we are preparing *them for when they are on the job...* Students offer a positive contribution to the office culture. (NESP Coordinator, PBHRWA)

These placements are meeting an identified gap in paramedic training and address stigma, which will ultimately reduce barriers to critical health care.

⁹ McCann, T.V., Savic, M., Ferguson, N., Bosley, E., Smith, K., Roberts L., ...Lubman, D.I. (2018). Paramedics' perceptions of their scope of practice in caring for patients with non-medical emergency-related mental health and/or alcohol and other drug problems: A qualitative study. *PLoS ONE* 13(12). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208391>

Capacity Building Projects

WANADA continues to build relationships with the tertiary institutions in Western Australia in an effort to enhance the future sector workforce.

To ensure knowledge gains are sustained, student projects are developed through negotiation with service management and workers. Resources, evaluations, guides and factsheets are examples of what has been developed by the students, to be used by the service and/or the alcohol and other drug sector in the future. Some of these resources are also built on by following students. (see Appendix B for examples of capacity building projects).

Some recent collaborations with Western Australian universities that have enabled capacity building projects by placement students include:

- University of Western Australia (UWA) - Medicine; Population Health and Global Health.
- ECU - Medical and Health Science; Bachelor of Health Science; Dietetics and Nutrition.
- Curtin University - Bachelor of Health Science (e.g. Health Promotion).

WANADA also works in partnership with UWA's McCusker Centre for Citizenship. From July 2018 to September 2019 WANADA supported six McCusker internships from a range of undergraduate and post graduate disciplines (see Appendix A and Appendix B).

Student Placement Impacts

WANADA's unique student placement program benefits students, member services, the alcohol and other drug sector, and alcohol and other drug service users. They meet identified gaps in alcohol and other drug training as well as enhancing services. Impacts of the WANADA's student placements include:

- reducing stigma among future health workers including doctors, pharmacists and paramedics;
- breaking down barriers and increasing confidence amongst future professionals in order to enhance treatment engagement and outcomes;
- building capacity of member services to enhance their holistic approaches to care; and
- building student's professional readiness to engage with, or work within the sector.

A significant proportion of students indicated increased interest in the alcohol and other drug sector as a career choice following their placement. Of the student cohort in this statement period, two students gained employment in the sector and five students were further engaged as volunteers.

WANADA invites students to become individual members. Students who have elected to be members of WANADA receive ongoing information about the alcohol and other drug sector, including job opportunities.

WANADA thanks their member agencies and key stakeholders for their support and involvement in the student placement program, and welcomes enquiries and expressions of interest via projects@wanada.org.au.

| University | Discipline | No. students |
|---|---|--------------|
| Curtin University | Pharmacy | 6 |
| Curtin University | Bachelor of Health Science | 1 |
| Edith Cowan University | Bachelor of Health Science -Nutrition and Addiction | 1 |
| Edith Cowan University | Bachelor of Health Science-Health Promotion and Addiction | 1 |
| Edith Cowan University | Medical and Health Science-Paramedic | 5 |
| Edith Cowan University | Social Work | 1 |
| Monash University Victoria | Pharmacy | 11 |
| University of Newcastle NSW | Pharmacy | 1 |
| University of Technology Sydney | Pharmacy | 7 |
| University of Western Australia | Pharmacy | 9 |
| University of Western Australia - McCusker Centre | Environmental Science | 1 |
| | Master of Population Health | 1 |
| | Master of Public Health | 1 |
| | Bachelor of Science - Psychology | 1 |
| | Bachelor of Biomedical Science | 1 |
| | Bachelor of Biomedical Science | 1 |
| University of Western Australia | Medicine | 3 |
| | Total | 52 |

Edith Cowan University – Master of Dietetics and Nutrition

Nutrition during the early phases of an alcohol and other drug treatment program

A Dietetics and Nutrition Masters student completed a six-week WANADA supported student placement at a WANADA member service. Nutrition education sessions were delivered, and a range of nutrition resources focused on healthy eating during the early phases of an alcohol and other drug treatment were produced. Two service employees engaged with the project were very motivated, enthusiastic and willing to conduct future nutrition sessions. The employees saw nutrition sessions as an extension of the existing services offered, and felt that it would enhance the program.

University of Western Australia – Medicine

Evaluation of a client-centred, community-based, multidisciplinary primary care model of Hepatitis C Virus treatment in a peer-based harm reduction service

A student studying medicine completed a three-year placement at a WANADA member harm reduction service. Following privacy and confidentiality protocols, service users' files were audited to understand the demographics of the clinic population. From this, possible participants were identified for a multidisciplinary primary care model of hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment, that was client-centred and community-based.

Validated instruments assessed HCV knowledge, injecting risk behavior, anxiety and depression, and quality of life. A consumer focus group was facilitated to obtain qualitative feedback on the treatment. For this project, ten participants completed the new HCV treatment. The HCV virus was eradicated in all participants. Findings of this project will inform future sector capacity building.

University of Western Australia – McCusker Centre for Citizenship

Promoting alcohol and other drug service programs – a service informed approach

A student studying Bachelor of Commerce: Management and Marketing completed a WANADA supported placement at a member service. Promotion resources were developed for three programs: Keep your mates safe; Healthy lungs project; Community based family supported accommodation service; and a new Hepatitis C treatment. A social media marketing guide was developed for the service, to be built on by future student placements. The guide incorporated approaches to engage alcohol and other drug service workers and service users in resource development and feedback.

Alcohol and other drug sector research and policy internship:

A Public Health Masters student and two Bachelor of Health Science students completed placements at WANADA. Factsheets for the Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields-Esperance, South West, and Great Southern regions were developed. From available statistics the factsheets identify:

- key demographic and population trends;
- alcohol and other drug co-occurring health issues;
- health infrastructure and services; and
- alcohol and other drug services in the relevant regions.

These factsheets will support whole of sector consultation to inform state policy and planning, and support local services' informed input.