

## **WANADA RESPONSE TO ALCOHOL AND DRUG FOUNDATION: OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

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The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the *Outcomes Framework for Family and Friends: Consultation Paper*.

Meeting the needs of people who are impacted by another's drug use has long been a priority for the Western Australian alcohol and other drug treatment and support service sector. This prioritisation has long (since the early 2000s) been systemically supported. Currently this support includes:

- A dedicated chapter on *Working with significant others*, in the *Counselling guidelines: Alcohol and other drug issues* (4<sup>th</sup> edition 2019).<sup>1</sup> This chapter is further supported with a list of research references.
- An expectation of organisations funded to deliver alcohol and other drug treatment in Western Australia to incorporate family and friend/significant others inclusive practice in their service models. This expectation is reflected in service agreements.
- Family inclusive practice training provided free of charge to sector workers as a part of the alcohol and other drug sector workforce development delivered by the Mental Health Commission.
- Pre- and post-evaluation questions specifically for family/significant others accessing alcohol and other drug treatment services for counselling and/or information and support.
  - o These evaluation measures address family/significant others': physical and mental health/well-being; quality of relationships; confidence (knowledge and skills) to respond to alcohol and other drug issues; as well as satisfaction with the service to meet their needs.
  - o These measures are required to be reported on by services funded by the WA Mental Health Commission. They are also frequently used to inform service continuous quality improvement and practice.
  - o Also, these evaluations (while not perfect) are currently under review in Western Australia, with a focus on determining identified outcome measures from the perspective of people with 'lived-experience' including family members and significant others.

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<sup>1</sup> Stone, J., Bennetts, A., Cleary, L., Ditchburn, S., Jacobson, H., Rea, R., Aitkin, D., Lowery, M., Oh, G., Stark, R., & Stevens, C. (2019). *Counselling Guidelines: Alcohol and other drug Issues* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Perth, Western Australia: Mental Health Commission. Pp29 – 33.

WANADA is concerned that the development of a national outcomes framework for family and friends is duplicating what is currently in place in Western Australia, and potentially burdens services with multiple (State and Commonwealth) contractual requirements.

The AIHW Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) currently collects data on people accessing treatment services for 'another's drug use'. This data does not reflect the support family and significant others are receiving from organisations not contributing to the NMDS, including those funded by the National Indigenous Advancement Agency.

Western Australian AIHW statistics for 2019-20 indicate 8% of people accessing treatment services contributing to this data are doing so for another's drug use. 21% of this cohort identified as Indigenous; a significant proportion (over 20%) were 10 to 19 years of age; and 23% were born in a country other than Australia.

- A definition of 'family or friend' is not clear in the consultation paper. Family members impacted by another's drug use range from an unborn child of a drug using mother; an infant, child, teenager, or stepchild with parent(s) who have issues associated with their drug use; a sibling; partner; parent; or grandparent or extended family member.
- There is a myriad of ways a friend may be impacted by another's drug use; however this is not explored in the consultation paper.
- The consultation paper does not adequately address cultural considerations in how a family and friend may be impacted by another's drug use, and therefore the need for culturally responsive supports, and cultural appreciation re what is included within 'family and friends'.

The consultation paper frequently refers to family and friends as the main sources of support for people with alcohol and other drug issues. There is also a significant percentage of people accessing alcohol and other drug treatment for their own use who do not have any such supports. In this regard many alcohol and other drug services are supporting reconnection with family members and community, including in culturally responsive ways. This is an area that is inadequately considered in the consultation paper for the outcomes framework.

It is important not to add to the stress (and stigma) of family members and friends by suggesting it is in anyway their responsibility to ensure a drug user achieves 'recovery'. This could be seen as implied in the consultation paper, for example in the background and context. Harm reduction strategies and options need to be included in the information and education provided, however this is not adequately addressed.

WANADA supports the focus being on the personal wellbeing of family and friends accessing services. Within this there is a need to:

- raise community awareness of where and how family and friends can access needed evidenced information and supports (despite the fact that there are barely half the services to meet current demand). Western Australia, and no doubt other jurisdictions, offer some support in this area through a parent alcohol and other drug

helpline. Consultation on the development of a framework needs to include such services, as well as the dedicated community based and outreach alcohol and other drug family alcohol and other drug treatment and support services (the following examples are in no way comprehensive: Pregnant and Early Parenting Women and Children's alcohol and other drug services; a number of residential services that are inclusive of family members including mainstream and Aboriginal Community Controlled residential services.)

- promote alcohol and other drug services as non-judgemental for family members (re stigma and discrimination). This is typically included in service descriptions in directories; however co-design of these descriptors could strengthen this message.
- promote the cross-sector collaborations that services may offer in relation to frequently intersecting issues such as family and domestic violence.

WANADA would suggest the framework acknowledges the achievements made to date by services to better meet the needs of family and friends – and provide a clear purpose of the framework for informing service advancement in delivery and outcomes to family and friends from across the system of alcohol and other drug services.

Please don't hesitate contacting WANADA if you would like further information on the WA alcohol and other drug sector in relation to this issue.

Yours sincerely  
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