



Curtin University

Strengthening Alcohol and Other Drug Education in Western Australia

Curtin University/WANADA Sector Capacity Building Project –
Executive Summary
March 2023

Make tomorrow better.

curtin.edu.au

Authors:

This report has been authored in partnership with the Western Australian Network for Alcohol and other Drug Agencies and was prepared by Dr Roanna Lobo, Dr Peta Dzidic, Dr Krysten Blackford, Associate Professor Lynelle Watts, Dr Angela Barns, Professor Bronwyn Myers, Ms Liv Williams and Ms Kayla Palmer. We acknowledge the assistance of WANADA throughout the project and the participation of staff in the alcohol and other drugs sector. We also thank the Curtin staff and students involved in this research for their valuable insights.

Suggested citation:

Curtin University enAble Institute (2023). Strengthening Alcohol and Other Drug Education in Western Australia. Curtin University, Perth.

© Curtin University enAble Institute, March 2023

Curtin University
Kent Street
Bentley WA 6102
enableinstitute@curtin.edu.au
<https://research.curtin.edu.au/enable/>

This report was developed for the collaborative project between the Curtin enAble Institute and the Western Australian Network for Alcohol and other Drug Agencies. This sector capacity building research project seeks to strengthen alcohol and other drug content in training and curricula within relevant Western Australian Courses. This project was funded by the Mental Health Commission, to enable investigation and improvement of the state of alcohol and other drug education in higher education institutions as part of a workforce development initiative.

Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA)

PO Box 8048
PERTH WA 6849
(08) 6557 9400
drugpeak@wanada.org.au
www.wanada.org.au
@WANADAFYI

Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) is the peak body for the alcohol and other drug education, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and support sector in Western Australia. WANADA's vision is for a human services sector that significantly improves the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities by addressing alcohol and other drugs. WANADA's purpose is to lead a shared voice within the specialised alcohol and other drug sector that drives positive change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Curtin University would like to pay respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our community by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which this report was developed, the Whadjuk people of the Nyungar Nation where the Curtin University Bentley campus is situated, and whose ancestors have lived here for over 40,000 years.

We respectfully acknowledge the Elders and custodians past and present, their descendants and kin, and honour these shared places of learning.

WANADA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and recognise their strength in connection to the land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge the widespread and intergenerational effects of colonisation. The policy and actions of dispossession established long-lasting barriers between peoples, land, and culture. Furthermore, we acknowledge that this trauma has a systemic presence in Western Australian society, policy, and the alcohol and other drug system. We acknowledge the need to address this issue by re-evaluating the systems in place that affect the cultural, social, and economic matters of Aboriginal people.

WANADA is committed to advancing conciliation/reconciliation and fostering the valuable contributions that Aboriginal people make in the alcohol and other drug service sector to deliver meaningful, lasting outcomes for Aboriginal people, families, and communities.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about the *Strengthening Alcohol and Other Drugs Content in Tertiary Training/Curricula* project, please direct all correspondence to:

Dr Roanna Lobo
Senior Lecturer
Curtin School of Population Health
Curtin University
Bentley, WA 6102

E: roanna.lobo@curtin.edu.au
T: 08 9266 1101

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *'Strengthening Alcohol and Other Drugs Content in Tertiary Training/Curricula'* was a partnership project involving the Curtin University enAble Institute (Curtin) and the Western Australian Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (WANADA). The project was initiated in response to growing interest in developing strategies to create a sustainable future alcohol and other drugs workforce and was funded by the Mental Health Commission. A summary of the outcomes and recommendations arising from this project are summarised below.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

1. Course mapping of available alcohol and other drugs-specific education in Australia in 2022.
2. Course mapping and assessment of alcohol and other drugs content appearing in relevant Western Australian, Curtin degrees in the disciplines of Health Promotion, Psychology and Social Work in 2022.
3. The Curtin/WANADA partnership and building of relationships between Curtin Unit Coordinators, Course Coordinators, teaching staff and WANADA representatives to aid in sustainability of alcohol and other drugs content inclusion and for future opportunities to include alcohol and other drugs course content.
4. Implementation of significant alcohol and other drugs-specific coursework content added to relevant Curtin units across disciplines of interest.
5. A commitment to continue including alcohol and other drugs content in tertiary level courses and a mechanism for evaluating the impact of enhancing alcohol and other drugs content on the student experience.
6. An initial bank of educational resources developed by the WANADA sector working group.
7. An example process of how to rapidly introduce alcohol and other drugs content into tertiary degrees that can be used by other higher education institutions.
8. Recommendations for enhancing the student placement model to promote work readiness for the alcohol and other drugs sector.
9. A case study for other sectors considering an industry-university partnership to enhance content in tertiary curricula.
10. Feedback from alcohol and other drugs sector workers outlining what constitutes work-readiness for the sector, expectations of new graduates, supports needed to facilitate recruitment of alcohol and other drugs staff and promote student interest in the sector, value-add activities that are achievable through student placements, strategies to increase availability of student placements and challenges and opportunities faced by the sector

The following recommendations from the Curtin/WANADA partnership project were identified. Short to medium-term and longer-term opportunities are presented.

SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM OPPORTUNITIES

1. **Ameliorative change – simple wins.** Continue introducing greater breadth and depth of alcohol and other drugs-specific content into relevant units across Curtin University. Continue introducing content into undergraduate Semester 1 units in 2023 across Health Promotion, Social Work, and Psychology courses. Informal discussion with Unit Coordinators (UCs) post content inclusion demonstrated success and positive feedback indicating the benefit of continuing this process.
2. **Evaluation of enhanced alcohol and other drugs content.** Incorporate an evaluation measure of the alcohol and other drugs content implemented into units to assess the effect on student interest in and awareness of the alcohol and other drugs sector, attitudes towards alcohol and other drugs sector service consumers, and level of knowledge of alcohol and other drugs content. Only informal feedback (and from UCs not students) was gathered, thus a proper evaluation is needed. A proposed student survey for this purpose is provided in Appendix 8.
3. **Implementation in other Western Australian universities.** Extend this project's course mapping, content development, and implementation process to other Western Australian universities to support incorporation of alcohol and other drugs content across relevant degrees state-wide.
4. **Bank of alcohol and other drugs resources.** Create a bank of alcohol and other drugs content resources for higher education teaching staff to implement into lectures and tutorials to reduce the barrier of workload burden. Commonly reported challenges by UCs were workload limitations, lack of knowledge from teaching staff to create own content, not knowing where to find accurate, and up to date and relevant content. A bank of resources could reduce these barriers and make it easier, therefore making it more likely for teaching staff to introduce alcohol and other drugs content.
5. **Continued relationship building.** Create and maintain professional relationships between sector stakeholders (e.g., WANADA representatives and service representatives) and education institution stakeholders (e.g., Course Coordinators and UCs) to promote the sustainability of alcohol and other drugs content in units. UCs identified that sustainability of content was an issue. If a new UC is appointed, they could change/remove existing (newly implemented alcohol and other drugs content) and people tend to cater to their personal expertise and interest. Building relationships to foster this interest and keep alcohol and other drugs front of mind was a suggestion to assist with this.
6. **Additional student placement opportunities.** Procure additional student placement opportunities at alcohol and other drugs specific agencies and advertise these to students through partnership with fieldwork coordinators at universities. Students interviewed said that there were not enough placement opportunities in alcohol and other drugs sector, hence limited number of students choosing them because of lack of availability. Feedback from sector staff suggested the burden of supervision needs to be recognised and valued with workload allocated to student supervision and agencies would be more willing to accept students with a genuine intention to learn and who are open-minded and non-judgmental. Fieldwork coordinators stressed the need for placement agencies to have a culture that is committed to and supports student learning.

- 7. Increase student exposure to people with alcohol and other drugs lived experience and the alcohol and other drugs sector.** Introduce panel discussions and question and answer format guest speaker lectures into relevant degrees to promote student interest and awareness of the sector and the engaging and rewarding nature of the work. Informal chats with UCs indicated that guest speaker involvement initially appeared valuable in promoting student interest in alcohol and other drugs sector, where previously it was not front of mind. Sector staff suggested opportunities to meet and greet students before placements.
- 8. Support agencies with onboarding of placement students and graduates.** Develop a universal work readiness/onboarding module covering attitudes, stigma, language use, and different substance categories content to prepare new graduates and student placements to work in the sector. Services can find onboarding resource intensive. The course would be developed by sector stakeholders and run in partnership with tertiary education providers.
- 9. Disseminate research findings.** Develop a co-authored paper reporting on insights from this qualitative research that outlines what we want students to know to work effectively in this sector. This will provide a track record for future grant applications in this area and could include commentary on skills shortages in all sectors not just alcohol and other drugs. Our project offers a conceptual model to support workforce development.

LONGER TERM OPPORTUNITIES

- 1. Enhancements to the student placement model.** Enhancements identified from this research included a) allowing flexibility in placement in terms of the number of hours per week to allow for a longer length of placement time and more exposure across time to complexity. At Curtin, an extended placement model could be explored through the extended teaching term, for example semester 1A; b) encouraging students to choose alcohol and other drugs placements by advertising the benefits but in a realistic way, preferably through having past students who have completed an alcohol and other drugs placement chat with new students choosing placement; and c) value-add activities to be implemented to include students doing a presentation on their thesis research in the context of how it may fit with alcohol and other drugs service provision, students contributing to a 'living' handover document about what is useful to know for future placement students to refer to, and students shadowing clinicians to gain a broad range of experience.
- 2. Consideration of a future workforce survey and student survey of perceptions of alcohol and other drugs sector.** A mechanism for tracking workforce developments and student perceptions of the alcohol and other drugs sector would provide evidence of the impact of workforce initiatives and identify ongoing opportunities for further workforce development. Alcohol and other drugs sector staff expressed concerns related to remuneration, employment stability, limited career development options, availability of training (e.g. trauma responsive training for all alcohol and other drugs workers) and program funding gaps which need to be addressed to increase attraction of individuals to the alcohol and other drugs sector and enhance retention of staff.
- 3. Consideration of a Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma in Alcohol and Other Drugs.** Student interviews revealed that the now discontinued generalised alcohol and other drugs unit was really valuable as the content in non-specific units was not in-depth, or in-breadth and easily forgettable. All alcohol and other drugs specific units at Curtin are now discontinued or recoded/no longer specific. Opportunity to revisit Curtin's previous 'Addictions Studies' major and assess whether it is viable to create a multidisciplinary AQF8 (Bachelor) course or major. Short form course such as Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma, too. Ideally this would

include different models of substance use disorders (SUD), aetiology of substance use, consumer lived experience input, service provider lived experience input, content about language considerations, attitudes and values restructuring modules to address implicit bias and stigma, treatment paradigms on an individual level, broader public health frameworks and opportunities to exercise practical skills.

- 4. Strategies to reduce alcohol and other drugs-related stigma.** Stigma impacts on attracting students to the alcohol and other drugs workforce and strategies are needed to reduce stigma of alcohol and other drugs-related issues.
- 5. Alcohol and other drugs sector guidelines as core competencies in tertiary degrees.** Incorporate the alcohol and other drugs sector guidelines as core competencies in relevant university degrees to enshrine alcohol and other drugs content as essential to the course requirements to aid in maintaining content sustainability. The reliance of alcohol and other drugs content inclusion on Unit Coordinator interest/motivation to do so, coupled with the need to work it around content addressing rigid accreditation requirements of learning outcomes suggests the need for a way to incorporate alcohol and other drugs content/knowledge/competencies in these requirements/standards etc. Require advocacy to maintain course structure. There is an over dependence on sessional staff and no workload available to maintain or update content.
- 6. Robust evaluation of alcohol and other drugs services.** Options could a social return on investment (SROI). Such evaluation has been completed in the Family and Domestic Violence area demonstrating why investment is useful and has bigger social impacts.
- 7. Exploring future opportunities for the alcohol and other drugs sector.** Sector workers highlighted several areas that are currently under-served including providing more support for people in incarceration or those leaving corrective services and returning to the community, working with peers, and enhanced service options for people with co-morbidities.



CRICOS Provider Code 00301J.

