

Shaping allied health new graduates: A framework for success

Rebekah Deighton¹, Marea Webb², Melanie Barnett¹.

Rationale

Background

Supporting allied health new graduates as they commence their career in public mental health alcohol and other drugs services (MHAODS) is essential to ensure that they develop their profession specific skills to provide high quality, safe practice, and to develop the allied health workforce pipeline. The new graduate program aims to provide allied health graduates with a positive transition to practice combining rotational clinical experience, supervision, peer reflection, training and education opportunities.

About

The Allied Health Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs (MHAOD) New Graduate Program (the program) is a comprehensive two-year (24 months) work-based new graduate program for eligible allied health new graduates. Whilst developed for Occupational Therapists, Psychologists and Social Workers, the program can be adapted for other allied health professions working in MHAODS.

The Allied Health MHAOD New Graduate Program Framework (the Framework) was developed to:

1. Make available an educational development path in MHAODS that supports adult education principles and promotes lifelong learning in MHAODS.
2. Support line/operational managers and supervisors in delivering the new graduate program.
3. Support new graduates in the development of core and specialist skills for allied health clinicians employed within MHAOD settings.

Key features of the program



Monthly graduate reflection and learning sessions

Monthly graduate reflection and learning sessions are a series of facilitated interdisciplinary peer learning, mentoring, and professional development sessions which cover a range of clinical and professional topics. Delivered virtually or in person, sessions require graduates to interact in a group conversation to explore a topic, discuss the underpinning theory and reflect on their practice.

Review of core skills through CSATs

A range of core skills and specialist skills assessments (CSATs) are being published to enable the assessment of the graduate's skills. They focus on two main areas:

- Core skills – skills which are considered fundamental for allied health working in MHAODS.
- Practice area skills – knowledge and skills relevant to a particular practice area, such as Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS), Mental Health Inpatient care or Alcohol and Other Drug Services (AODS) etc.

Acknowledgements

West Moreton Health Allied Health Graduate Program in Mental Health
Allied Health MHAOD New Graduate Program Project Reference Group and working group participants
Allied Health MHAOD New Graduate Program 2024 cohort new graduates, supervisors and line managers
Allied Health Workforce Lead, Community and Acute Services, Mental Health and Specialised Services, West Moreton Health

¹ Office of the Chief Allied Health Officer, Queensland, Australia
² Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service, Queensland, Australia
For further details, email OCAHO-MHAODS@health.qld.gov.au

Insights from Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service

Implementation of the New Graduate Framework

The employment of new graduates within the Darlings Downs HHS through the pilot program allowed for more formal structures to be put in place to support the new graduate. Local supports, as well as the opportunity to link virtually with other graduates across the state enhanced the graduate experience and learning opportunities. Several key implementation strategies used by the service to support the graduate's successful completion of the new graduate program included:

Recruitment

- Promoting the role to psychology students who have had exposure to mental health placements resulted in a larger candidate pool than expected.
- A new graduate application form was trialled this year which gave graduates a structure for their responses in their written applications.

Communication

- Regular formal & informal check-ins involving graduate, managers, supervisors and discipline leads.
- Utilisation of telehealth to support communication across workplaces.
- New graduate-led learning goals and regular engagement in the identification of learning and rotation opportunities to support identified learning goals.

Supervision

- Maintaining consistent supervisors (both professional and operational) through all rotations allowed skill development building on previous experiences, a deepening of the supervisory relationship and fostered feedback to be provided in a way that supported development.

Rotations

- Access to a variety of practice areas in a regional setting enhanced skill development.
- In addition, the contrast between regional (Toowoomba) and rural (Dalby/Chinchilla) communities highlighted differences in teams and available services.

Teams that support success

- Promote and develop discipline specific scope of practice.
- Recognise value added by the graduate to the team and consumers.
- Welcomed encouraged contributions by the graduate.

Graduate Feedback

"It was a great learning opportunity to move around different teams and roles and understand the processes behind each team."



"I really enjoyed my rural stint as it provided a lot of variability and complexity with consumers that I had not seen."

Bridgette Ostwald was new graduate psychologist employed in the new graduate program pilot. Bridgette is now employed permanently as a psychologist within a rural mental health team on the Darling Downs.

Resources

New Graduate Program Framework and resources via the QR code or visit:

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/ahwac/html/allied-health-workforce/mental-health/new-graduate-program>

