

NADA Women's Alcohol and Other Drugs Service Development Program 2013 -2015

Program Evaluation and Future Directions Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Background

In 2012 the Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (NADA) - the peak organisation for the non-government alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector in NSW - was funded by the then Australian Department of Health and Ageing to administer a Sector Capacity Building Project for non-government services (NGO) in NSW. One of the priority areas of the Project was to establish service networks, either related to geography or client group. This resulted in NADA forming the Women's AOD Services Network.

The Women's Network brought together twelve specialist women's AOD NGO's providing services in NSW. The first meeting of the Network took place in January 2013.

In mid 2013 the same department funded NADA to run the Women's AOD Services Development Program (referred to as the Women's AOD Program or Program).

Working from priorities identified by the Women's Network, the Program aimed to build the capacity of non-government AOD services and staff to better meet the needs of substance using women and their children across NSW.

The initial Women's AOD Program commenced in July 2013 and concluded at the end of June 2015. In the final month the now Department of Health agreed to extend the Program for an additional twelve months.

EJD Consulting & Associates - a specialist social policy and human services consultancy firm - was contracted by NADA to conduct an independent evaluation of the first two years of the Program. A summary of the evaluation findings and future directions are described below.

About the Program

The initial two year government grant to NADA for the Women's AOD Program was \$825,000. The funding agreement specified the resources were to be used to undertake four specific capacity building objectives:

1. Conduct a needs analysis of NGO providing AOD treatment to women in NSW
2. Develop practice guidelines for working with women engaged in AOD treatment
3. Distribute one-off service development grants to specialist women's AOD services
4. Provide support to services through partnership, organisational and workforce development activities.

As described below, NADA delivered on each of these objectives across the two year Program. It also undertook a number of additional capacity building activities using a combination of Program under-expenditure and contributions from other NADA resources.

The Program was developed and implemented with input from a specially convened Expert Advisory Group comprising representatives from the funding body- Department of Health and Ageing; the Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Office, NSW Ministry of Health; National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction; and National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

At any one time two NADA staff worked on the Program, one as Program Manager and the other as Project Officer.

Program Outputs and Key Findings

The Program's core deliverables and outputs can be broken into four main areas as follows:

◆ Resources and Other Products

From 2013 through to mid 2015 NADA oversaw the development and distribution of five key resources as part of its Women's AOD Program. These comprised:

- producing a Women's AOD Service Directory containing detailed information on each of the specialist services in NSW and how to refer and access them
- establishing a Women's Services feature page as part of the NADA website, containing key resources, helpful articles and key contact details
- undertaking a comprehensive needs analysis report using available literature and identified gaps in the service system faced by women with substance use issues in NSW

This was completed and widely distributed in May 2014. It fully delivered on the first Program objective and provided a sound base for other activities that followed, including the development of the Practice Resource (described below).

- publication of a special women's edition of NADA newsletter *Advocate* in June 2015. This included over ten articles written by experts in AOD service delivery for women.
- publication of a major evidenced-based Practice Resource, entitled *Working with Women Engaged in Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment*.

Published in July 2015, this resource, at 92 pages in length, fulfilled the third Program objective. It is specifically designed for use by mixed gender services using best

practice content and specialist advice drawn from experts in women's AOD treatment and engagement.

The resource is the biggest legacy of the Program. It is likely to provide ongoing capacity building opportunities for many years to come.

In addition:

- in October 2015 NADA is set to publish a Profile of Women's AOD Services in NSW highlighting each of the twelve Women's Network services. This document will operate as a complement to the detailed Services Directory available online. It is aimed at promoting the sector to other AOD services and also other parts of the NSW human service system that engage with women with complex health and social issues.
- Two of the Program's service enhancement grant recipients - WHOS and Dianella Cottage (described below) - are in the process of publishing the outcomes of their funded project in a sector publication or peer reviewed journal.

The evaluators found that each Program resource and product was informed by a sound research base and delivered to meet a specific need or knowledge gap identified by the sector.

Over a short period of time, these products have substantially added to the information base on how to best engage with, and support, women with substance use issues in NSW. All feedback indicated they are highly valued by stakeholders and are likely to be used and referenced by the AOD sector well into the future.

◆ **Service Enhancements**

As stated in the third Program objective, a key Program deliverable was the distribution of one-off service development grants to specialist women's AOD services. In total eight grants were distributed by NADA following an expression of interest and independent assessment process.

Five of the projects were based in metropolitan services and three were based in regional NSW, specifically the Blue Mountains[#] and the Central Coast^{*}. Two services hosted two different service enhancements grants.

While all grant projects had a strong research base and multiple outcomes:

- four projects delivered new models of care or enhanced service offerings to women:
 - *Jarrah House* *Improving Culturally Appropriate Support for Aboriginal Women*
 - *Kamira** *Aftercare Transition and Housing Pilot Program*
 - *Katherine York House* *Aftercare and Outreach Program*
 - *Katherine York House* *Day Program*
- three projects developed a strong evidence base to better inform current service models:
 - *Dianella Cottage[#]* *Standpoint Research Project*
 - *Guthrie House* *Women's Choice and Change Program*
 - *WHOS* *New Beginnings Delivering Trauma Informed Care*

- one project (due to conclude in October 2015) was focused on developing a new collaborative partnership model between AOD services and government child protection staff
 - *Kamira** *Family and Community Services (FACS) Program.*

All grant recipients were required to submit interim (six month) and final (twelve month) reports to NADA describing the status of deliverables against their detailed project plans. These reports also included feedback on a number of standardised capacity building criteria.

Grant recipients reported major benefits for their service and clients from the grant, with all reporting:

- increases in their organisation's capacity to support substance using women
- improved access to or retention of women in their service
- improved internal systems, such as policies, procedures or practices, that support substance using women
- improved and sustainable linkages and partnerships with others to better support substance using women in and post treatment
- improved outcomes for substance using women in their service.

While grant recipients commented on NADA's professional and efficient grant administration processes, it was recommended that there be some streamlining of project plans and reporting templates. There was also feedback to suggest that extending the project reporting timeframes (from 58 to 65 weeks for example) would be useful to enable client data and other deliverables to be included in final project reports.

◆ ***Professional Development and Training Initiatives***

While not an explicit deliverable of the Program, NADA's management of the Women's Program resulted in over 171 NSW AOD staff and management being provided with professional development and training opportunities directly related to improved services for women with substance use issues.

The bulk of this training (130) was made possible from redirecting underspent program resources from 2013-14. This resulted in NADA offering (in two separate rounds) specialist women's AOD services an opportunity to receive professional development grants to allow staff to participate in courses directly relevant 'to improved women's treatment outcomes'.

In total eight different AOD NGO's benefited from the professional training grants program, with 130 NGO staff and managers receiving professional training. Broadly speaking 16 different training topics were funded, involving a mix of external delivery and in-house group sessions. The most common topics were:

- Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (with 28 staff trained across five organisations)
- training related to working with children and infants (with 26 staff trained across 3 organisations).
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (seven staff trained across two organisations)
- Trauma Informed Care (or similar) (with five staff and managers trained).

All training grant recipients were required by NADA to provide survey feedback on a set of standard capacity building measures. All (100%) feedback indicated that the training was worthwhile and:

- had significantly improved their knowledge of the topic
- had improved their capacity to work with women with substance use issues
- was likely to lead to improvements in their personal work practices
- was likely to lead to improvements in their organisation's work practices.

Specialist women's AOD service managers interviewed reported their appreciation of the training grants. They also endorsed NADA's method for reviewing grant applications and allocating funding.

All respondents strongly argued for more opportunities for professional development training related to women, with the priority topics including:

- trauma informed care
- domestic violence and sexual assault
- family inclusive practices
- working with children and engaging with child protection staff.

In addition to the training grants, a women's stream was included as part of NADA's 2014 State Conference. Presentations and discussions were led by 11 experts in the field. Abstracts of all papers delivered are available on the NADA website.

Based on the success of this session, NADA is proposing to run a supplementary women's stream in its 2016 Conference.

◆ ***Collaborations and Partnerships***

A final deliverable of NADA's Women's AOD Program related to collaborations and partnerships as per the fourth Program objective. The major outcomes were delivered through the Women's AOD Services Network.

NADA's Women's Network comprises representatives from NADA's member organisations that provide specialist services to substance using women, including those that also provide services to their children (pre and post-natal). There are presently 12 Network members.

Since the start of 2013 the Network has met every two months to exchange information and improve their clinical practice in treating women.

All members interviewed strongly valued the role the Network plays and believe the sector is substantially stronger than before the group was established. Specifically, the Network is attributed with:

- improving the knowledge and awareness of practices and strategies for assisting women and their children
- providing a professional forum for discussing good clinical practice for women
- strengthening inter-service relationships and collaborative ways of working
- improving referral pathways and service options for women.

In addition, the Network has been instrumental in providing content for various Program resources and in other ways raising the profile of women’s AOD sector in NSW. In 2015-16 these activities will be significantly built on with developed plans for undertaking additional sector advocacy, education and service promotion activities.

The evaluation concluded that the formation and ongoing resourcing of the Women’s Network was highly successful in terms of capacity building. Its future lies in securing an ongoing secretariat capable of maintaining a focus on sector development and other practice-based outcomes.

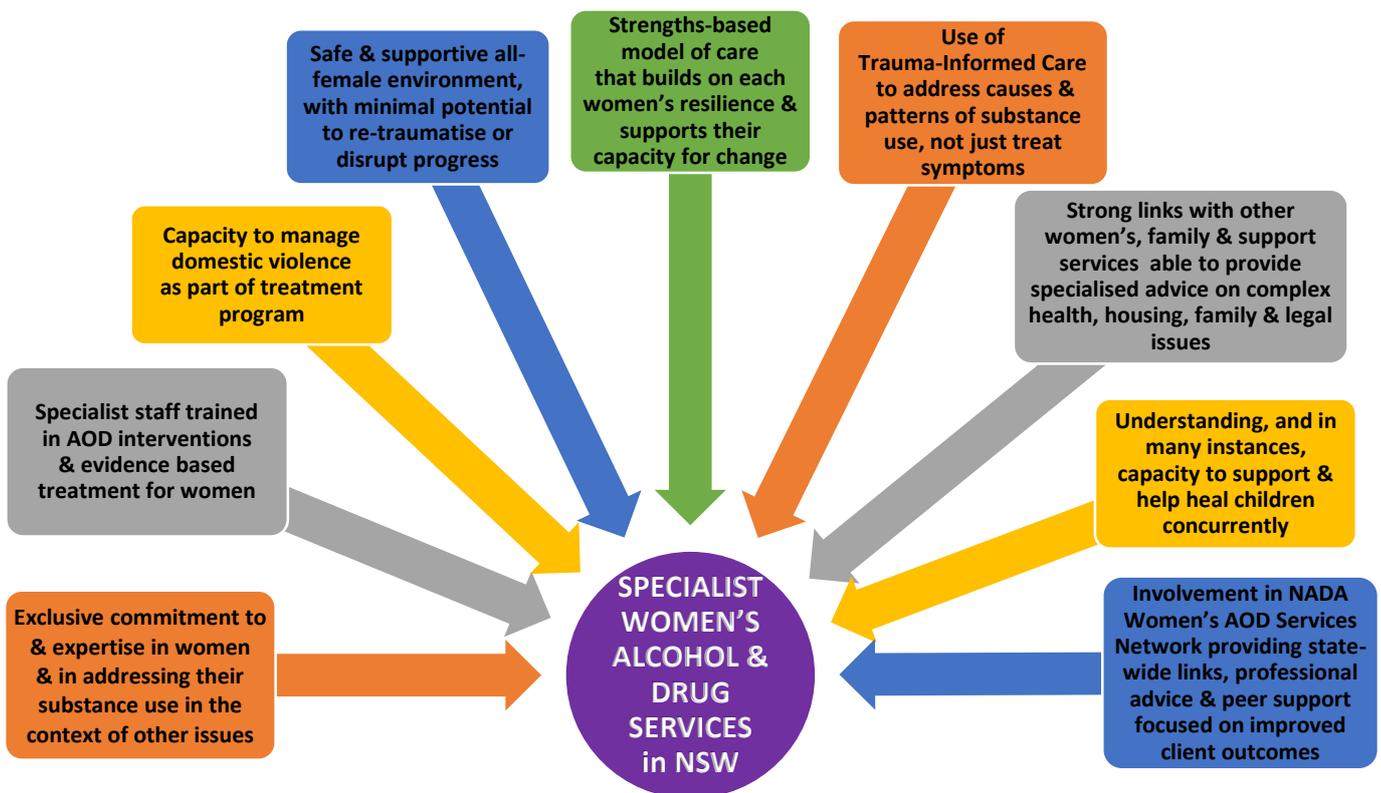
The evaluation recommends the Network pursue further collaboration initiatives, including through convening regular round tables with other AOD providers and women’s services with a shared interest in engaging with women and children with complex health and social issues.

◆ **Program Management**

The evaluators found the overall design and implementation of the Program to be efficient and effective. Based on established administrative tools and sector engagement processes, NADA was able to quickly roll-out and then report on the Program outputs and deliverables.

The scale of the Program outputs and outcomes (described above) are considered substantial especially given the two year timeline and the modest Program budget overall.

Sector Strengths



In the course of conducting the evaluation, it became apparent that the specialist women's AOD service sector in NSW has a number of unique features and capabilities. While some of these strengths are shared with mixed gender AOD services, and/or some other women's services more broadly, the combination of features documented in the diagram above are considered unique to the specialist AOD sector.

They suggest the need to further promote the sector, and ensure it receives ongoing funding in order that services can continue to support women and also their children with complex health and social issues.

Future Options

Given these strengths, the evaluation identified a number of options for how the women's AOD sector in NSW could be strengthened in the future. These include:

- commissioning new research to better document:
 - the numbers and profile of women in NSW seeking treatment for their substance use
 - common pathways and barriers to rehabilitation including those involving multiple service providers and multiple service systems regarding their and their children's health, safety and well being
 - options for strengths-based models of care that better match demand and provide integrated treatment responses for women and their children impacted by substance abuse, domestic violence and other complex health and social issues.
- better educating government decision makers and other key service providers on the:
 - value of specialist women's AOD services, and their unique capacity to support women with complex needs including those with histories of trauma and family violence
 - desirability of having access to pooled, and more secure, funding programs with reduced levels of red-tape. This would reduce current uncertainty created by variable funding cycles, and different government policy and program agendas relating to women.
- providing opportunities for all AOD staff, including those in mixed gender services, to receive professional training in trauma informed care and other evidenced-based interventions for women. State-wide roll out of training linked to the Practice Resource would be a major first step in this regard
- reviewing current service options and potential gaps for supporting pregnant women with substance use issues in NSW
- in respect of ongoing stigma and 'discrediting' of women with substance use issues, particularly in personal safety and domestic violence cases, ensuring relevant public authorities (including police, child protection staff and court officials) are more aware of:
 - the links between trauma and substance use
 - support options available through specialist AOD women services in NSW.

Conclusion

The evaluators concluded that NADA's oversight of the Women's AOD Service Development Program was professional, practical and results-based. The Program succeeded in delivering a substantial quantity and quality of outputs. Further, the evaluators concluded that the breadth of effort, combining:

- new resources and publically accessible information via the NADA website
- evidence-based and provider appropriate service enhancements through the grants program
- professional development and training opportunities for the AOD sector, plus
- new collaborations and partnerships primarily driven through the Women's Network,

significantly contributed to building the capacity of women's services to better engage with and treat women in NSW.

Overall the evaluation report makes 41 recommendations for the future, most related to extending successful components of the 2013-15 Program and expanding the reach and impact of the evidence-based practices and approaches it produced.

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