

The wait time to access non-government alcohol and other drugs services in NSW

November 2024

Context

There are 101,773 people in NSW who do not receive treatment despite being suitable for and wanting treatment. However, little has been known about how many are actively seeking treatment on any one day. An online survey was distributed to all NSW NGO alcohol and other drug (AOD) organisations to report on wait data on any day in late September 2024. Organisations that responded provide many different services (e.g. withdrawal, counselling, residential rehabilitation) both within single organisations, across different locations and across organisations.

The wait for treatment

- ***There were 1,819 people waiting to enter an NGO AOD treatment organisation on any day during the week of 23-27 September 2024.***
- When asked about the number of people waiting for each service type (noting that some people are placed on multiple wait lists – the same person could be on a wait list for withdrawal management (detox) and residential rehabilitation, which is a common treatment pathway), the total number of people waiting for a specific service type on any day during the same week was 2,667.
- Residential rehabilitation had the largest numbers and proportion of people waiting for treatment (897 people or 34% of all those waiting).
- Assessment and initial treatment plan had the second highest numbers of people waiting for treatment (n=628 or 24%), followed by residential withdrawal (n=460 or 17%) and psychosocial counselling (n=257 or 10%).
- The service with the highest average wait time was residential withdrawal where 50% of all people waiting had been doing so for between 12 and 26 weeks. Noting that a proportion of these people were also waiting for residential rehabilitation which would delay the availability of a bed.
- The highest proportion of people waiting to enter a service (29%) were waiting between 1 and 3 weeks. However, the second highest proportion (22% or 520 people) had been waiting between 12 and 26 weeks for AOD treatment.
- 69% of respondents said that the wait data was fairly typical of the situation over the past 6 months.

What is data not telling us: The reported figure of 1,819 people waiting for treatment on any given day is based on data from 44 out of 84 organizations that participated in the survey. This means the actual number of people waiting could potentially be twice the reported number. Additionally, the survey does not account for those waiting for treatment in public or private AOD services, suggesting that the total number of people seeking treatment on any one day in NSW is much higher than what is reflected in this data.

The Solution

To address the unmet demand for treatment, NADA recommends increasing funding to existing treatment providers to expand their services to respond to the demand for treatment, as detailed in the NADA Drug Summit Brief, [Increasing access to specialist alcohol and other drugs services: Funding of the non-government alcohol and other drugs sector](#)

Contact Details

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