

Establishing an education centre for the NSW alcohol and other drugs sector

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Introduction

The alcohol and other drugs (AOD) workforce in NSW face multiple challenges resulting from short term contracts, clinical complexity, underfunding and rising service demands competing with time for professional development, and other initiatives that support staff retention. There has never been a more critical time to consider workforce sustainability.

NADA are frequently asked by members to provide recommendations on quality training providers and courses, as they seek to support new workers who come with limited AOD experience, as well as address development needs of experienced clinicians and managers. NADA and its members are also approached by cross-sector partners with requests for training to build capacity of workers in adjacent sectors e.g. corrective services.

In the past, the Centre for Education & Information in Drugs & Alcohol (CEIDA) was funded to deliver both accredited and non-accredited education to the AOD sector. This proposal seeks to re-establish an education centre to provide training for the AOD and adjacent sectors, with a program that is informed by and for the sector to reflect changing workforce needs.

Key features/benefits

Informed by initial member engagement and existing models, these key features are recommended in a proposed model:

- Education centre to be established as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to enable provision of nationally accredited qualifications as well as non-accredited training
- Training is fully funded and delivered at no cost to participants, to enable equitable access to all and remove financial barriers to accessing professional development
- The opportunity to incorporate a coordinated sector practice placement program to enable new entrants to achieve minimum work requirements for qualifications and support pathways to employment in AOD
- Like CEIDA, the organisation could also be responsible for the development of targeted AOD resources, either from inception or at a later stage.

A consistent, well-resourced and high-quality benchmark for AOD training

- Provision of consistent and trusted high-quality standard of education across the AOD sector
- Development of training that is responsive and customised to current and emerging needs and priorities
- Improved access to specific AOD qualifications and training, particularly for workers in regional/rural areas

Training informed and facilitated by and for the NSW AOD workforce

- Education is delivered by a pool of trained facilitators who also work in roles across the AOD sector and use their living/lived experience and work experiences to enrich the learning
- Training workers as facilitators enables them to 'give back' to the future workforce and supports retention
- Learning from others working in the sector enhances engagement and provides a uniquely tailored experience for students
- Ability to utilise existing AOD workforce in regional areas to deliver training in own local community

Build cross sector capacity to respond to AOD needs

- As well as delivering targeted education for the AOD sector workforce, relevant training can be developed for cross sector workforces who frequently engage with people who use AOD, such as child protection, corrective services, mental health, disability and police.
- This would focus on reducing stigma and discrimination, understanding the AOD service system, skills to identify AOD needs and respond effectively.
- This feature responds to recommendations from the Ice Inquiry to deliver education for mental health workers, for community and other sectors to enhance practice and reduce stigma (Rec 2, 4 and 45).

Options

1. Education centre operated by NADA and established as a separate entity to peak operations.

NADA is well positioned as an industry-based agency with expertise in sector and workforce development and delivery of tailored initiatives. The extensive connections NADA holds with stakeholders across the sector and its 85 members, would ensure delivery of education that reflects current and future workforce needs, and is centred on practice development. This enables NADA to collaborate with members who provide specialist services to priority populations and who have an existing role in developing and sharing practice approaches for these groups.

2. Education centre operated by an alternative agency within the AOD sector

Successful delivery of a dedicated education program to the AOD sector relies upon deep knowledge and experience of this workforce. It is therefore a priority that the proposed centre be delivered by an organisation who brings knowledge of the sector and broader contexts that it operates within, as well as the factors influencing service delivery and workforce capacity development.

3. NADA partner with an existing RTO to deliver accredited and non-accredited training in AOD

This would see NADA collaborating with an existing NSW RTO who may already be delivering AOD qualifications or providing training to community sector workers. NADA's expertise in AOD workforce needs and practice knowledge would inform development of targeted training programs, with a functioning RTO contributing the necessary administration and compliance arrangements.

The following is recommended as a supplement to ensure the success of options 1, 2 or 3

4. Grow the workforce of accredited AOD trainers to enable RTOs to increase delivery of AOD education

New RTO standards from July 2025 will enable RTOs to work with facilitators who are working towards their qualification in training and assessment. In partnership with existing RTOs, NADA would promote the initiative to the AOD workforce, enabling these new trainers to initially work alongside experienced trainers to build capacity. Removal of training and assessment qualification costs would provide incentive and swiftly build this much needed pool of trainers, resulting in increased access to AOD training across NSW.

This paper was endorsed by NADA members at the 2024 NADA AGM event.