

New graduate allied health in mental health – a workforce development programme

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Allied health professionals are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team approach in our Mental Health, Addictions and Intellectual Disability Service (MHAIDS). Over recent years, we have found it increasingly challenging to recruit and retain sufficient social workers (SWs) and occupational therapists (OTs) to effectively deliver services to consumers and their whanau.

Services are reluctant to employ new graduates because it is difficult to provide them with sufficient supervision, role-modelling and on-the-job training to develop the specialised skills required for work in MHAIDS. Combined with a small pool of experienced SWs and OTs from which to employ, this has led to delays in recruitment and in some cases services replacing allied health roles with other health professionals, thus further depleting the pool of allied health expertise.

To address this workforce issue, after extensive consultation with stakeholders we are establishing an Allied Health New Entry to Specialist Practice (AH-NESP) programme for new graduate SWs and OTs. The year-long programme consists of academic study (Post Graduate Certificate in Health Science (Mental Health)), clinical practice across a variety of specialist areas, service specific training and supervision, preceptorship and support.

On successful completion of the programme, we anticipate new graduates will be well equipped for permanent employment in the sector and more likely to remain in this workforce. This will contribute to ensuring consumers of MHAIDS have access to the range of social and occupational interventions that are an integral part of living well.