



National ATOD Research and Evaluation Priorities Survey

The Australian AOD Peaks Network believes that research and evaluation is critical to achieving best outcomes for people impacted by alcohol and other drug use. The alcohol and other drug sector works closely with individuals, families and communities to address alcohol and other drug issues and is in an ideal position to inform the national research agenda on alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol and other drug services' own research and evaluation is highly valuable and can be applied to improve service user outcomes and service delivery performance, report outcomes, inform funding applications and government policy.

The National AOD Peaks Network Research Collaboration Project is intended to develop and implement activities that enable the Network of Peaks to inform the national research agenda for the alcohol and other drug sector. A short survey was developed to learn more about the research and evaluation needs of the Australian alcohol and other drug sector. The survey was distributed by each peak to its members and related stakeholders.

107 responses were received from organisations, 82 providing usable data. Responses came from 75 non-government organisations, 7 government sector agencies and responses were received from all 8 states and territories.

Of those organisations responding, there is a notable-trend towards larger NGO organisations. This presents a frame of reference that is important to consider when analysing the barriers to research engagement. It is evident that barriers such as organisation capacity and resources impact both larger and smaller organisations and those with fewer staff.

60% of respondents reported that their organisation had been involved in ATOD specific research or evaluation projects in the last 3 years. For those that reported that they had *not* been involved, the most common reason cited was a lack of funding or resources, followed by a lack of capacity (time/staff workloads) and that the organisation had wanted to be involved but couldn't be because of limitations. Respondents also mentioned that research is not a core function of the organisation, a lack of relationships with experts to support research or evaluation and a lack of suitably skilled/qualified staff.

Limited resourcing remains a central issue in regards to the sector's engagement in research activities. Addressing resource constraints is necessary if research engagement is to be improved. While there is opportunity to provide centralised or coordinated training opportunities to address limited organisational capacity to deliver internal training, resourcing to engage in research requires individual service support.

Despite established barriers to engaging in research, the sector has a range of existing relationships with research bodies, universities, and other research partners. The broad range of research stakeholders with which the respondents have established relationships indicates both the variety of entities engaged in research, and demonstrates the range of stakeholder relationships that have

been developed and maintained. If existing barriers to research engagement are addressed, there is opportunity to further leverage these existing relationships, to support both practice informed research, and research informed practice.

Existing research stakeholder relationships and activities have been broad, but have clearly focussed upon service delivery, demographic needs, service models and evaluations. This is understandable: given limited capacity to engage in research, organisations have focussed upon those activities that will directly inform and/or support service delivery. There was, however, limited participation in topics such as workforce or organisational development. Within limited funding, it is clear that organisations have focussed upon core organisation functions (i.e. delivery of funded services.). Addressing staff skills in undertaking research and sourcing and supporting clients as participants will require targeted systemic action, including training opportunities or secondments, and additional consumer co-design to determine and address other barriers to research participation.

Organisational needs:

All respondents were asked to identify what they may need to enable greater participation in research. The most common responses were:

- Dedicated funding to provide the resources needed to effectively participate
- Flexible funding arrangements that allow for research activities to be included in funding body activity plans.
- Being able to reimburse participants would motivate both clients and staff to participate.
- Improved relationships with experts able to support research and evaluation would improve participation.
- Opportunities for communication and networking between services and researchers
- Research must be seen as relevant and participation must provide a clear benefit to the organisation, staff and clients.
- Opportunities for services to identify emerging issues and communicate client experiences.

Research Priorities:

Respondents were asked about what they feel should be the priorities for researchers for the next 2-3 years. The most popular responses were:

- Treatment models and approaches*
- Treating Co-occurring issues**
- Youth AOD issues
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations
- Domestic Violence
- Workforce Development
- Addressing stigma and discrimination
- Impact of new and emerging substances
- Collective Impact models

*Treatment models and approaches specifically identified included:

- CBT
- Effective referral pathways
- Withdrawal/rehab for methamphetamine
- Individual or group approaches using ACT, mindfulness or trauma focus

- Effective responses to particular drugs
- Non-abstinence based approaches, particularly day programs that allow people to continue to use while engaged with the program
- Translating effective approaches used internationally for use in Australia

****Co-occurring issues specifically identified included**

- Mental health
- Family and Domestic Violence
- Gambling

Respondents identified the AOD peak bodies as valuable sources of information relating to research findings. They also identified a range of other sources including Conferences/Seminars, Training/Workshops, newsletters, subscriptions and journals. Respondent organisations also have a number of mechanisms in place to apply research into practice, including peer to peer sharing, external professional development and clinical supervision. Respondents also identified barriers to implementing research findings, including limited capacity to provide internal training, that information is not presented in an easy to interpret way, lack of external professional development.

Further opportunities:

The findings of the survey identified a number of opportunities for peak bodies to contribute towards enabling organisations to participate in research, inform the national research agenda and support organisations to implement research into service development and individual practice.

- Provide centralised or coordinated training opportunities to address limited organisational capacity to deliver internal training
- Further leverage existing relationships with research bodies to support both practice informed research, and research informed practice
- Explore training opportunities or secondments, and additional consumer co-design to determine and address barriers to research participation
- Utilise existing networks as opportunities for services to identify emerging issues and communicate client experiences to improve research participation
- Brokering and promoting relationships between both research and service sectors, to build mutual understanding regarding both parties' value propositions
- Identified research priorities promoted and workshopped further with research organisations, and sector engagement facilitated (or consortia created) to support the development of more detailed research proposals
- Run a research related survey regularly to continually inform the national research agenda with relevant issues.
- Advocate for additional, targeted resources that support research translation and the embedding of new research-informed practices.
- Further build upon current strengths of the peaks through coordinated and complementary actions that support both research promotion and more direct engagement activities.
- Leverage existing practices for research implementation and complement with targeted resources. When applied along with information sources such as seminars or events, there is potential to further reduce the delays of research translation into practice.