The State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drugs Peaks Network Position Statement: Workforce Development

Key messages:

1. The overriding purpose for workforce development is to ensure best outcomes for individuals, families and communities impacted by alcohol and other drug issues
2. The state and territory alcohol and other drug peaks are best positioned to coordinate a comprehensive workforce development approach
3. A comprehensive workforce development approach is necessarily focused on individual, organisation and systems development.

The Peaks Network notes that:

- The alcohol and other drugs workforce is diverse. It comprises of two main groups—the 'specialist workforce' and the 'generalist workforce'. The core purpose of the 'specialist workforce' is to prevent and respond to alcohol and other drugs-related harm; key roles include alcohol and other drugs workers, nurses, allied health workers, doctors and peers. The key purpose of the 'generalist workforce' is not alcohol and other drugs specific, yet they nonetheless are involved in preventing and responding to alcohol and other drugs-related harm; key roles include police officers, ambulance officers and general practitioners [1].
- Workforce development is defined as *a multi-faceted approach which addresses the range of factors impacting on the ability of the workforce to function with maximum effectiveness in responding to alcohol and other drug-related problems. Workforce development should have a systems focus. Unlike traditional approaches, this is broad and comprehensive, targeting individual, organisational and structural factors, rather than just addressing education and training of individual mainstream workers [1].*
- Workforce development activities are unlikely to achieve sustainable results if they are single issue focused and fail to address the range of individual, organisational, and structural factors that impact on the ability of the workforce to function to maximum effectiveness [1,2].
- The need for workforce development becomes increasingly important as clients' needs change and the issues dealt with by the non government alcohol and other drugs sector

become increasingly complex [3]. Key challenges facing the non government AOD workforce include, but are not limited to, issues relating to the changing client and staff population, changing patterns of substance use and the emergence of new substances, new paradigms and treatments, emerging evidence relating to alcohol and other drugs harms and treatments, and increasingly complex funding arrangements [1,3].

- Despite the relevance that alcohol and other drugs use has for a range of sectors, effective cross-sector collaboration is not widespread [2]. Workforce development activities that enhance opportunities to collaborate and share practice wisdom have become increasingly relevant. Aligning effort across organisations and sectors is likely to be more effective than any agency or sector acting alone [2].

The Peaks Network capacity statement:

- Developing, facilitating and promoting opportunities for alcohol and other drugs workforce development is a key component of each state and territory Peak body's operations.
- The capacity of each individual Peak body is both supported and constrained, by funding and staffing.
- The workforce development activities already being undertaken by the Peaks are broad in scope, and evident at the *individual, organisational* and *systemic* levels.
- The Peaks' support for workforce development at the *individual level* can be seen through initiatives such the administration of training grants programs to support individual and group training for front-line workers, through the development and provision of training on critical and emerging issues for the staff of member organisations, and through the promotion of external training opportunities to members through formal communication channels.
- The Peaks support workforce development at the *organisational level* by assisting managers of member organisations to provide healthy work environments with a focus on good governance and professional development for staff. Peak bodies in each of the jurisdictions offer managerial staff assistance with policy development, quality improvement and general management training, and support and guidance.
- Supporting workforce development at the *systemic level* can be seen in the current advocacy activities of the Peaks. In particular the Peaks have formed the *Peaks' AOD Network* that advocates at the state/territory and national levels for support to increase the capacity of the alcohol and other drugs workforce, be this through training opportunities, open consultation with governments and communities and/or through securing appropriate and stable funding. Many Peaks also run events (e.g. conferences, fora, roundtables) to promote best practice and highlight issues of concern to the sector.
- We note the proven value of sector capacity building activities undertaken by the Peaks. In a 2015 external evaluation of the Peaks' capacity building activities, 92% of survey respondents "identified as having been achieved to 'a great extent' or 'to some extent' the outcome that 'Alcohol and other drugs sector workers are better skilled and or/or more confident in their roles'" [4].

The Peaks Network affirms the following principles:

- The specialist alcohol and other drugs workforce should have access to regular, relevant professional development opportunities.
- Specialist alcohol and other drugs organisations should be supported to ensure workforce development is integrated into continuous improvement activities (e.g. clinical and line supervision).
- The Peaks Network members are uniquely placed to consult and respond to the workforce development needs of the specialist alcohol and other drugs sector.

The Peaks Network believes that the following processes should be undertaken:

- Commonwealth and jurisdictional health departments continue to fund peaks to undertake workforce development specific to the specialist alcohol and other drugs workforce, acknowledging their ability to respond to the specific workforce needs in their jurisdictions.
- The Peaks Network work with NCETA to align with, and respond to priorities in the National Alcohol and Other Drugs Workforce Strategy.
- The Peaks Network influence university and RTO providers' curriculum and content to ensure that alcohol and other drugs is included to support a new and emerging workforce, and better prepare them for the workplace.
- The Peaks Network provide a targeted approach to workforce development to support the different levels of the workforce (e.g. frontline, managerial, administrative) and disciplines (e.g. peer, allied health, nursing, medicine).
- The Peaks Network seek to ensure the health and wellbeing of the workforce through initiatives that support worker safety, respond to vicarious trauma, and provide appropriate supervision (clinical and general).

The Peaks Network commits to undertake the following actions:

- A comprehensive and coordinated workforce development approach for the alcohol and other drug service sector that addresses individual, organisational and systemic initiatives.
- Maintaining and developing the specialist alcohol and other drug workforce and promoting the service sector's role in building the capacity of relevant sectors to respond appropriately to people with alcohol and other drug concerns.
- The Peaks Network collaborate with the research centres to ensure any workforce development initiatives are informed by best practice.

References

1. National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, *National Alcohol and other Drug Workforce Development Strategy 2015-2018*. 2015, Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs.
2. Allsop, S.J. and C.F. Stevens, *Evidence-based practice or imperfect seduction? Developing capacity to respond effectively to drug-related problems.* Drug and alcohol review, 2009. 28(5): p. 541-549.
3. Spooner, C. and A. Dadich, *Non-government organisations in the alcohol and other drugs sector: Issues and options for sustainability*. 2008: Australian National Council on Drugs.
4. McDonald, D. *Evaluation of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Peak Bodies' Roles in Building Capacity in the Non- Government Alcohol and Other Drugs Sector*, Social Research and Evaluation, for the Peaks Capacity Building Network, Wamboin, NSW, 2015.