

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Health Peer Support Workers - Agents of change bringing a lived experience workforce to support the health of people with serious mental illness

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Theme 5

1. Living Well Living Longer is a program funded to improve physical health outcomes for people living with severe mental illness. Health Peer Support Workers(HPSW) are employed in community mental health teams to strengthen consumer engagement in their own health and wellbeing

2. HPSWs have increased rates of engagement in care, increase rates of physical health screening, and contributed to improved social, emotional and physical wellbeing of care co-ordinated mental health consumers

3. HPSWs facilitate patient centred care that is consumer led, recovery focussed, strengths based and develops connections between the consumer, the mental health service, primary care providers and the non government sector. They provide a focus on integrated physical health care that champions the consumer as the expert in their own experience, and they partner with the consumer in the recovery journey, to address health disparities using a range of non clinical strategies

4. People living with severe and enduring mental illness, who are care co-ordinated by the Sydney Local Health District mental health service. Key stakeholders are HPSWs, mental health consumers, their carers/families, care co-ordinators and primary care providers.

5. The positions were funded for 3 years through a NSW Health Innovator grant, and became permanently funded in June 2017

6. Embedding the positions into a mental health team had significant impact on the way the team worked with consumers, and subsequent improved health outcomes

The program is the first of its kind in NSW to use HPSW to target physical health as part of a strengths based recovery framework for improving physical health outcomes amongst the cohort. HPSW support increased consumer health literacy and healthy lifestyle goal setting, and improved screening and treatment for physical health co-morbidities.

7. The workforce will be further developed as the positions are an enhancement to the existing model of care for Sydney Local Health District mental health services.

8. The model can be adapted to unique needs of other mental health settings and services

9. Evaluation showed an increase in consumers who accessed a GP, received screening and treatment, and identified the HPSW engagement as a positive, non-clinical experience.

The positions act as care navigators across complex health systems, reducing consumer distress. They use positive story-telling and individualised support. They improve meaningful communication and consumer connection to the treating team.

10. HPSWs assist care co-ordinators and consumers to increase rates of physical health screening, improving short term and long term physical health outcomes for consumers. By sharing their own recovery journey, HPSW provide consumers with hope that recovery can be positive, done in partnership, focussing care on the whole person, not just the mental illness.

The HPSW have also assisted consumers to access healthy lifestyle activities and clinical services

11. HPSWs are not clinical service providers. There is a discreet and unique aspect to their role and their interactions with consumers and care co-ordinators

The community mental health teams saw value in the unique approach the HPSWs brought to integrated service delivery through their participation as team members

Keywords: lived experience; recovery; peer support; care navigation; consumer focussed care
