

## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

# Improving collaborative mental health care across Australia: development and evaluation of the Mental Health Professionals Network (MHPN) initiative

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Chris Gibbs<sup>1</sup>, Barbara Murphy<sup>2,3,4</sup>, Kate Hoppe<sup>1</sup>, Deepika Ratnaik<sup>5</sup>, Harry Lovelock<sup>1,6</sup>

1: Mental Health Professionals Network, Melbourne, Vic, Australia;

2: Department of Psychology, University of Melbourne, Vic, Australia;

3: Faculty of Health, Deakin University, Bundoora, Vic, Australia;

4: School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia;

5: DR Consulting Group, Sydney, NSW, Australia;

6: Australian Psychological Society, Melbourne, Vic, Australia

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**Introduction:** The Mental Health Professionals Network (MHPN) was established in 2008 to improve consumer outcomes in the primary care sector by fostering a collaborative clinical approach to the provision of mental health care in Australia. MHPN is a not-for-profit organization funded by the Australian Government Department of Health. This presentation will describe the development of MHPN and present results of evaluations of MHPN's two key programs.

**Short description of practice change implemented:** The MHPN national platform has two key programs by which it promotes collaborative mental health care: network meetings and webinars. MHPN interdisciplinary networks comprise groups of practitioners who meet face-to-face on a regular and voluntary basis. While networks are self-directed in determining membership and content covered, MHPN provides strategic and planning advice, and manages meeting logistics, communications, and administration tasks. At 30 June 2016 there were 380 networks across Australia with a total of over 10,000 participants. During 2015-16 there were 1,171 network meetings and 14,835 network meeting attendances. MHPN professional development webinars feature case-based discussions by leading experts, modelling interdisciplinary practice and collaborative care. From December 2010 to 30 June 2016, MHPN produced 52 webinars. Overall, there have been more than 160,000 individual views of the live webinars or downloadable podcasts.

**Aim and theory of change:** Collaborative practice is recognised as a necessary element for an integrated health delivery system. MHPN's activities are based on the premise that if practitioners from different disciplines connect and communicate on a regular basis, clinical pathways will be more effective, referrals better informed and service-delivery improved.

Targeted population and stakeholders: MHPN targets psychiatrists, general practitioners, psychologists, mental health nurses, social workers, pediatricians, occupational therapists and other mental health practitioners.

**Timeline:** MHPN was established in 2008 and continues to grow and evolve.

**Highlights:** During 2015-16, evaluations of MHPN's two key programs were undertaken: Study 1 surveyed network meeting attendees and assessed change across seven areas relating to increased awareness of and interaction with professionals from other disciplines. More than 75% respondents had made each practice change, with those who attended more meetings significantly more likely to have made changes. Study 2 surveyed webinar attendees. Three months post-webinar, 80% respondents had made practice changes, including increased confidence in providing mental health care, increased discussions about other disciplines and improved targeting of referrals.

**Comments on sustainability:** MHPN continues to monitor its structure, policy and practice in order to maintain sustainability of the initiative.

**Comments on transferability:** The MHPN initiative is potentially transferable to other settings and countries.

**Discussion and Conclusions:** The two studies demonstrate that MHPN interdisciplinary network meetings and professional development webinars have impacted positively on health professionals' attitudes and practices towards a more collaborative approach to mental health care, highlighting the success of the MHPN initiative. Evaluation findings will be published in the Journal of Integrated Care in 2018.

**Lessons learned:** The high attendance at both network meetings and live webinars underscores the strong interest and desire amongst Australia's mental health workforce for interdisciplinary networking and professional development opportunities.

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**Keywords:** mental health; collaborative care; networking; interdisciplinary practice; professional development; primary care

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