

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Integrated practice makes perfect: the opportunities and challenges of supporting vulnerable populations with a health justice partnership in a community setting

2nd Asia Pacific Conference on Integrated Care, Melbourne, 11-13 November 2019

Stephanie Price

West Heidelberg Community Legal Service At Banyule Community Health, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

West Heidelberg Community Legal Service ('WHCLS') is a community legal centre that provides assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the Banyule region of Melbourne. For almost 40 years, WHCLS operated a unique integrated legal service delivery model through its co-location with Banyule Community Health. In 2014, the legal and health service merged, formalising the health justice partnership underpinning the long standing collaboration between the services.

Implementing an integrated practice model in a community health service which engages with a population ranked among Australia's most disadvantaged has highlighted a range of unique challenges and opportunities for practitioners and clients.

In particular, this presentation explores how the benefits of a flexible, innovative and multi-disciplinary service response can be achieved while maintaining and protecting traditional and less malleable client protections that are created by the lawyer-client relationship, such as legal professional privilege.

For legal and health practitioners there is a need to reconceptualise established discipline-bound approaches to adapt to a context of integration. Ensuring open and effective communication between disciplines without risking clients' rights and practitioners professional obligations can involve: joint team meetings; focusing on shared goals rather than shared clients; joint attendance at community events and outreach activities; sharing anonymous statistical data and collaborative efforts to align community services i.e. child care and legal appointment rosters. These approaches can improve the quality and accessibility of services available to the community while maintaining clients' rights in their engagement with health, legal and social support services.

Increased communication between collaborating services and disciplines (i.e. legal and health) allows for a constant re-evaluation of potential discipline-bound assumptions, helping practitioners broaden their understanding to provide a service that enables clients with complex needs to feel better recognised and supported while improving health and legal outcomes.