

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS ADVISORY COUNCIL – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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Question 4: What is the single most important recommendation Council could make to the existing ecosystem structure to build, enhance and measure recovery capital?

Short Response

Practice to scope, require evidence-based practices, & necessitate transdisciplinary collaboration. The complexity and diversity of challenges confronting many Albertans with addiction and mental health needs means that one discipline or profession cannot do it all.

Practice to Scope

We lack benefit from professions in the existing ecosystem when there is not an alignment between their scope of practice and their role in treating addiction and mental health. By continuing to rely on our physician resource for functions that can be accomplished by other trained and regulated health care providers, we are further limiting access to needed health care services as well as adding unnecessarily to the workload of physicians.

This is nowhere more acutely felt than within mental health care where the services of regulated mental health care providers, like psychologists, are not covered by our public health insurance systems.

Example -- Common scope and practice gaps for psychologist

- Inability to admit to inpatient and outpatient addiction and mental health services in public institutions.
- Inability to certify patients for admission when judged at risk for harm to self or others.
- Inability to refer patients within systems to other health care providers (specialist physicians as well as other kinds of health providers).

Such issues create bottlenecks to care and could reasonably be expanded to the “most responsible clinician”, thereby recognizing the competence and authority of other regulated health care providers to initiate referrals such as registered psychologists. This would:

Existing Ecosystem

- Reduce the burden of care on family physicians in the provision of community-based health services
- Facilitate the delivery of seamless interdisciplinary health care within public health care institutions
- Enhance greater equity in access to mental health care

Require Evidence-Based Practices

Requiring use of (and tracking of) evidence-based practices develops expertise in treating addiction and mental health and demonstrates outcomes that better facilitates funding and program decisions to optimize care. Practicing psychologists create, assess, and use evidence-based practices to address emotional and behavioral health problems.

Progress-Monitoring – use of progress monitoring techniques can reduce clinician self-evaluation bias, identifying arising needs, increase the quality of services, and aid in clinical decision making which results in better outcomes and cost savings.

Evidence-Based (but not templated) Services -- There is significant heterogeneity in the needs of Albertans. Without evaluations patients may tend to drift in a course of therapy that may not meet their needs (even if evidence-based).

These practices increase expertise, improve practices and services, increases retention rates, and can be used to examine the overall effectiveness of programs and services. Psychologists have expertise in evidence-based practices and progress monitoring.

It is essential that these are used in an atmosphere in which patients feel free to provide feedback, without the fear of retribution and with the hope that their feedback will affect the quality and nature of services.

Example – Psychology’s Role in the Opioid Crisis

The opioid crisis a public health emergency which is exacerbated by the lack of access to non-pharmacological treatments for pain. Psychologists have considerable expertise in both pain and substance use with unique skills and training to improve prevention, treatment, and recovery services, as well as better manage pain through nonaddictive and non-pharmacological approaches to prevent opioid misuses in acute and chronic pain.

Existing Ecosystem

Prevention -- People with mental health problems are at increased risk of opioid use problems. Psychologists can administer psychological assessments that predict which patients are at risk for misuse and addiction. And, can teach people to manage pain without opioids.

Intervention – Although medications have been the gold standard for treating opioid use disorder, psychological interventions can improve treatment for opioid addiction and address the comorbid conditions that go along with it.

It is a priority to build the capacity of the primary care system to assess and treat opioid-related concerns.

Transdisciplinary Collaboration for Person-Centered Communities of Practice

Well done and appropriate intervention saves resources long term. The complexity and diversity of challenges confronting many Albertans with addiction and mental health needs means that one discipline or profession cannot do it all.

The most effective team models are transdisciplinary, rather than interdisciplinary (just a collection of professions involved). Transdisciplinary collaboration exceeds the level of integration typical in most collaborations and fosters a greater community approach towards intervention. Most beneficial is an individually tailored array of interventions delivered by many different professionals.

There is particular value in having one body (i.e., an Assessment Referral Team) that organizes, facilitates, and tracks the referrals to different health professionals, monitors the uptake recommendations, and runs interference with the allied professionals if problems arise.

Example -- Integrating Psychological Services into Primary Care

Including psychologists in transdisciplinary care teams for primary care has been demonstrated to optimize positive outcomes for patients and to utilize limited health resources more effectively. Psychologists in primary care settings play a major role in early intervention and treatment of mental health and addiction including screening, assessment and treatment, consultation, and program evaluation.

PAA is the voice of, and for, psychology in Alberta.

**Our mission is to advance the science-based profession of psychology
and to promote the well-being and potential of all Albertans.**

PAA collaborates with government, health care, and stakeholders in advocating for science-based public policies such as these recommendations specific to cannabis legislation in Alberta.