



Rural community health intake study: client intake for adult counselling in rural community health



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Community Health Services are the sole provider of counselling for adults in some rural areas of NSW and the only fully funded ones in many others. Intake is the route by which people access community health counselling services.

The people with the highest risks will be the least likely to access services. Most people will only make one attempt to access the service. For this reason it is important to have qualified and experienced clinicians at intake. Intake systems should maximise accessibility and not inadvertently become a barrier to entry themselves. Reception is inherently a significant part of intake.

People who come to the Health Service may be in an acute emotional, psychological or social condition. Although Community Health is not a crisis service it does need to be able to identify and respond to people in crisis. It is not the responsibility of members of the public to know how Health Services are organised. It is the responsibility of the Health Service to be able to take enquiries and deal with them flexibly, compassionately, accurately and quickly. When a person walks in to or phones a Health Service they should succeed in accessing the health service they need.

The more visible Community Health is, the easier it is to access. The steps in the intake pathway should be as close to one as possible, and ideally, there should be no separation of intake from service delivery. Intake workers should be the most qualified and experienced. Any dedicated intake staff, should be a part of the service delivery team and meet with them regularly to ensure understanding and communication between staff. People should stay with the same worker when possible. They should be welcomed to the service with consideration, and respect. Overall, no single model of intake is superior in all circumstances, but these identified features can be addressed regardless of which intake system is used.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Rohena Duncombe is a Social Worker based at Byron Bay Community Health Centre. In addition to her role at NCAHS, Rohena also works part time with Charles Sturt University teaching in the Social Work and Human Services program.



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