

Briefing to new Government - Increasing access to addiction treatment in Aotearoa

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dapaanz

fostering excellence in addiction practice

Dapaanz is heartened the 2017 Coalition Government accepts the solution to addiction lies in the improvement of access to treatment rather than the current emphasis on enforcement.

Dapaanz looks forward to partnering with the new Government to develop workable solutions that will bring our drug policy in line with many other countries reducing the impacts of addiction for individuals, families/whānau and their communities. As the peak addiction sector body, we have the required knowledge, expertise and networks to help, and welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how we could best do this.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand the cost of addiction to society is estimated at \$1.8 billion annually yet we spend around \$150 million each year on treatment. This makes little sense and dapaanz contends spending a little more to increase addiction treatment will save much more in health, social and justice costs.

One of the biggest problems is a dis-incentivised workforce

The problem is that increasing treatment options and making them more widely available cannot work without increasing the qualified, highly-skilled practitioner workforce. Under current conditions it is a workforce that will be difficult to grow.

Starting salaries for addiction practitioners can be well below \$40,000 and even qualified and experienced practitioners earn significantly less than their peers in the health and other allied sectors. Also, practitioners working in NGOs doing the same or similar work earn 10-20 percent less than their counterparts working in DHBs.

We need to attract and retain qualified practitioners to ensure a better future for those impacted by addiction. To achieve this dapaanz believes pay inequity must be resolved.

Addiction practitioners must be valued more highly

This is about professionalisation. Addiction practitioners have a minimum applied bachelor degree. They do extremely valuable and important work resulting in positive outcomes for individuals, families/whānau, and their communities.

The work of treatment practitioners:

- has a dramatic impact on the wellbeing of communities
- helps turn antisocial behaviour into prosocial behaviour
- makes an incredible difference in the lives of people with addiction and their families/whānau
- reduces health and welfare costs, and the need for prison beds
- reduces crime and its impact on communities.

And, we expect them to do all this for very poor wages. Meanwhile, the impacts of drugs like methamphetamine and synthetic cannabinoids mean practitioners are increasingly faced with clients who have complex needs including psychosis. Caseloads are also burgeoning in work environments that are fraught with complex issues around new substances.



These problems are only going to get worse, and if it weren't for the dedication and compassion of our current addiction practitioners, no one would be doing this work. It is simply wrong that we continue to rely on practitioners' going the extra mile for inadequate remuneration.

Solutions are not difficult or radical

There is a big pool of workforce potential the addiction treatment sector can draw on with little fuss. People can become registered as fully competent addiction practitioners and get jobs in addiction services if they are qualified in one of the allied professions (e.g. nursing, counselling and/or social work, etc).

Attracting just 100 people from the allied workforce would change the face of addiction treatment in New Zealand. Therefore, dapaanz sees great benefit in the Government re-allocating some funding to support allied workers wanting to move to the addiction sector.

We need to increase our range of treatment options

It is crucial to increase and retain the workforce, so we can increase the range of treatment options because one size does not fit all. Having more qualified addiction practitioners will reduce waiting lists so that treatment providers respond more quickly to people in need and people's problems do not escalate.

- Resources must be increased towards early identification/intervention and treatment.
- People should be assessed for addiction through appropriate social services, doctors' surgeries, or wherever they go for help.
- Increased availability of services would make it easier for people to get help early before they resort to crime.
- Waiting list times must be eliminated so people receive help when they ask for it. When clients wait months for treatment their problems do escalate.
- Currently a person with a methamphetamine addiction could wait four months before being admitted to a residential programme.

About dapaanz

Dapaanz is the member association representing the professional interests of people working in the addiction treatment sector and has more than 1500 members. We:

- exist to support our members
- foster and maintain ethical and competent addiction practice
- manage endorsement and registration processes
- promote professional development
- advocate for the workforce and people affected by addictions.

Find out more at www.dapaanz.org.nz.

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