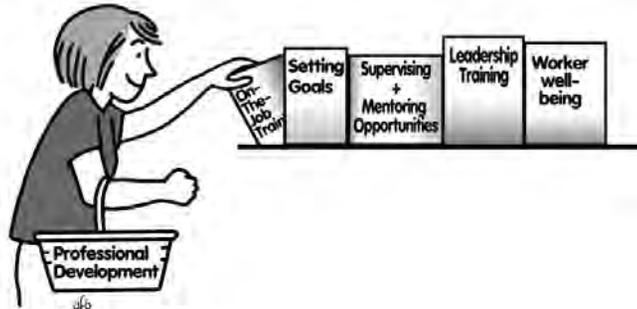


## Workforce Development Pathway 7 – Professional Development

*A recovery-oriented service gives staff the opportunity to increase and enhance knowledge, engage in reflective practice and to make progress in their careers.*



### What will you get out of this chapter?

- ✓ An understanding of what is professional development and why it is important
- ✓ How to conduct a learning and development needs analysis - individual, team and organisation
- ✓ Professional development strategies
- ✓ A practical & holistic way to conceptualise career pathways in this sector
- ✓ An understanding of the VET and higher education options for staff

Professional development should always be contextualised within a recovery-oriented framework. It plays an important role in enabling the workforce to promote recovery, develop recovery skills, and to convert the philosophy of recovery into reality, in partnership with consumers and carers. This chapter provides managers with the strategies and opportunities available to build basic skills and competencies in current and future staff. This involves a clearly defined minimum standard for our workforce and clear, accessible and varied learning and development pathways for current and future Community Mental Health Support Workers, Consumer Workers and Carer Workers.

### What is professional development?

Professional development has traditionally been thought of in terms of training and development. It is true that skills training and capacity building, by-products of professional development, lead to an increasingly sustainable and capable workforce. However, **professional development is now seen to include a range of options which develop workers' knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to ensure that they can work confidently and effectively, thus improving service provision.** Professional development incorporates supervision and mentoring opportunities, on-the-job training, leadership training, and organisational structures to ensure the creation of a learning culture that embraces recovery principles and practices in the workplace.

## Why is it important?

Professional development is a crucial part of staff development. **Managers in the community mental health sector cite as one of their greatest needs access to appropriate and affordable training opportunities that has a community delivery focus and that allows people to learn in more flexible ways.** It is important that managers work together with staff, consumers and carers to recognise current skills and knowledge, identify areas for development, and then help staff to incorporate recovery practices into professional development goals. The workforce, in partnership with consumers and carers, is at the heart of achieving a recovery-oriented service system.

The diversity of the community mental health support, consumer and carer workforce, in terms of the range of skills, experience and qualifications of its workers, is the greatest resource for this sector. However, one of the challenges for managers is to ensure that all current workers are properly qualified to deliver services, and future workers are provided with appropriate training. The introduction of a voluntary minimum standard qualification for community mental health work will ensure managers are clear on core skills needed for work in this sector. This will enable the transfer of skills across the sector which will strengthen the whole workforce. Clear entry points into community mental health work will also promote this sector and community mental health as a viable career option. This promotes a culture of professionalism across the sector and can help break-down the distinction between clinical and non-clinical services. Increased professionalism also supports workers to understand the value of skills training and continuing professional development. This becomes particularly important as Community Mental Health Support Workers, Consumer Workers and Carer Workers increasingly need to be trained in specialist skills in addition to the core skill base to meet the changing needs of consumers.<sup>141</sup>

The community mental health sector is a sector where on-the-job training and reflective practice plays a particularly important part in the transfer of skill. Managers should strive to promote and maintain a structure within the organisation that allows for this flexibility of learning.

### **Barriers to successful professional development:**

- Training in the past has been ad-hoc with a 'skills deficit' focus
- At times the courses that staff express interest in attending are not relevant to their work or organisational goals/values
- Backlog or filling positions while people attend training
- Excessive/intensive workload
- Fragmented employment structures (i.e. a higher proportion of part-time, casual and contract workers)
- Training is seen as taking employees away from service delivery and direct service provision
- Difficulties knowing how to disseminate and implement this new information across the organisation once the training is complete
- High cost of training and courses
- Difficulty for geographically remote or rural organisations to access training

## How to conduct a learning and development needs analysis in your organisation

### **Why is a needs analysis useful?**

The first step for managers in addressing professional development is to undertake a thorough and accurate learning and development needs analysis within the organisation. This is a systematic assessment of the learning and development needs of the individual, team and organisation. This identifies gaps in existing knowledge and skills, and allows management to plan, in collaboration with all staff, the most appropriate and significant staff development strategies that will lead to better workplace practice. A learning and development needs analysis may uncover other areas for development, such as policies, procedures and paperwork used to support the provision of services. **A needs analysis is not limited to identifying training needs only - it often**

has the indirect benefit of identifying areas in addition to learning needs for review and development. This is where a careful consideration of resources will assist in prioritising needs, and different strategies will be appropriate for different areas of need. It may be worthwhile to consider the use of an external consultant to assist throughout the needs analysis process.

### Step 1 - Conduct a learning and development needs analysis

The learning and development needs analysis is designed to identify the skills and knowledge of the current workforce as well as identifying the anticipated competencies needed to meet future requirements. The learning and development needs analysis will provide information on the areas of greatest priority for further development.

As part of this learning and development needs analysis, managers need to ensure that all staff has up-to-date **job descriptions** (see Workforce Development Pathway 4). This is best done in collaboration with existing staff.

Once the job descriptions are clear, managers, together with staff, can then create an **individual learning and development analysis**  which provides information on the 'match' between actual skills of workers and skills required for current roles. This provides an opportunity to see in which areas individual staff may need or want further professional development. This will guide the kind of professional development strategies implemented by management. An individual needs analysis is also about aligning the current workforce's skill set with the organisational goals and vision, and addressing possible career pathways for current workers. Involving consumers and carers in this process will also identify areas that they consider important to professional development to enhance service delivery and recovery outcomes.

**A team needs analysis**  is distinct from an individual needs analysis. It is recognised that individual skills and competency alone does not secure team effectiveness and success. The team needs analysis should be conducted in a similar manner, however, beginning with a clear definition of the skills and knowledge required for their roles and duties. It may be useful to form a group of staff to 'champion' this team needs analysis in partnership with management.

**Organisational/agency learning and development needs analysis**  involves a comprehensive study of the individual skill and knowledge base set against the organisation's goals and values, and deliverable outcomes. It exposes organisational factors, such as resources available and support systems, which may help or hinder the transfer of new knowledge and skills or the implementation of professional development strategies. It outlines the current skills being used by the organisation, and any skill gaps which need attention

The kind of information to be gathered in a learning and development needs analysis:

- Current skills and knowledge
- Actual job requirements
- Skills and knowledge to be learned on-the-job
- Skills and knowledge to be gained from professional development
- How successfully are roles being performed, i.e. job performance
- Areas that staff recognise they would like to improve or learn
- Career pathways
- Future requirements for staff and organisation and will the current skill and knowledge set address these needs
- Consumer and carer perspective

## Step 2 - Set goals

The findings from the learning and development needs analysis will provide impetus to form goals and objectives for professional development. They will also form a clear picture of areas of potential growth in order to meet current needs and future demands. There may be areas that need to be strengthened or revised, or new skills and knowledge to be taught from the beginning.

Goals are most effective when they follow the **SMARTER** guideline, that is, they are **specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely, evidence-based and reviewable**. Goals should also be challenging and meet the needs of both the individual and the organisation so that everyone involved is motivated and committed to achieving the set goal(s). Goal development also allows managers and staff to together prioritise their needs, ensure that there is a common understanding of the goals, and define outcomes that will be used to evaluate the success of the professional development strategy.

## Step 3 - Develop a learning and development plan

This step involves the coordination of individual, team and organisational needs into a cohesive plan that addresses the goals formulated in the previous step. Again, this is a collaborative process between managers and staff. The success of the learning and development strategies depends largely on how well you have planned implementation. To be covered during the planning stage:

- The resources - financial, expertise, facilities and other - required to implement changes
- How success will be measured and evaluated
- Target dates and behaviours
- Goals and objectives of professional development
- The people managing or overseeing the program
- The professional development needs of particular people, roles, teams, etc.

## Step 4 - Identify and implement professional development strategies

External training can be both costly and impractical in community mental health organisations where time and staff are tightly resourced. Training is not sufficient on its own, and the extent to which new skills and knowledge are disseminated in the workplace depends on the structures and management in place that allow for transfer of skills.

Managers need to be innovative in their approach to professional development. **There are a range of different, interesting, in-house professional development activities which can provide excellent opportunities for exchange of skills and knowledge, reflection, up-skilling, networking, and personal development.** The most important thing is that managers need to assess the 'best fit' for the organisation and provide a range of options for the workforce.

Professional development strategies include<sup>142</sup>:

- Study groups
- Supervision and mentoring
- Coaching
- Planning days
- Site visits
- Journal clubs
- Online discussion groups
- Cross-organisational exchanges
- Online learning
- Professional association membership
- Internships or placements

## Step 5 - Evaluation

Evaluation is an important tool in any venture to measure success and make improvements to

future initiatives. In the case of learning and development strategies, a comprehensive evaluative process will ensure that the initiative has been effective in achieving its goals and the organisation and individuals have benefited in some way. It will also identify the areas to be improved upon in the future. There is no one way to conduct evaluation in your organisation as it will be determined by a range of organisational factors and the outcomes being measured. However, some things to consider about evaluation:

- What is it exactly you are trying to measure? What were the original goals?
- What would be the most appropriate way(s) of measuring outcomes, i.e. methodology? Consider size of organisation, culture, available resources
- Are you interested in short-term outcomes or long-term outcomes?
- What is a measure of the success of your learning and development strategies/needs analysis? How will you know if you have succeeded?
- Who is it important to involve in this evaluation process?
- What avenues exist for feedback?
- What are the individual/team/organisational outcomes?
- What can be improved upon in the future?

It is important in any initiative to have robust qualitative as well as quantitative information to help improve transfer of training into practice and implementation of new practices. There is a need to develop greater **quantitative** measures for evaluating the effectiveness of learning and development initiatives.

## Career pathways - Professional and personal well-being

Clear career pathways, in the traditional sense of leading to increases in remuneration and job role/responsibility, are not always feasible in the community mental health sector. For this reason, this guide speaks in terms of the importance of '**professional and personal well being**', which acknowledges other ways by which managers can increase worker well being and satisfaction. It does not wish to diminish the importance of career development, but is a shift of thinking to a more holistic view of professional goals and aspirations. It is about making frontline work in community mental health a legitimate and respected career choice.

If people are satisfied in their job, and feel 'safe' in their work environment, then career pathways become less of an issue. The process of reflective practice, both personal and organisational, is part of promoting well-being at work. If the organisation is mirroring the individual's reflective practice, and vice versa, and each are responding to changing needs, then the worker is likely to feel greater congruency with their job role and professional goals, and more efficient.

**Job satisfaction and worker well-being are very much tied in with how appreciated a worker feels, and if they are rewarded for their good work.** If a frontline Mental Health Support Worker has shown excellence in support work, this is not to say they necessarily have the qualities to become a manager. A movement up the career ladder may in fact take them further away from using the skill-set where their talents lie, where they are happiest, and where they are most valuable to the organisation. Here it is about providing opportunities for professional and personal development.

Organisations need to think laterally in terms of career pathways for Mental Health Support Workers, Consumer Workers and Carer Workers. An example of this is creating senior titles, e.g. Senior Support Worker Role which recognise excellence and expertise in a particular area, or accepting movements across organisations as a sign of strengthening community health organisations. Encouraging a 'sideways' movement within an organisation that is clearly explained and outlined at the recruitment level allows Mental Health Support Workers, Consumer Workers and Carer Workers to see where they can move, and areas where they might want to become more skilled or set professional goals.

Providing opportunities to multi-skill staff enables lateral movements within the organisation, for example, staff can nominate to fill positions as they become vacant or if

someone is absent/un-well. By enabling staff to become multi-skilled and try working in different areas staff learn what they are good at and enjoy most.

As part of review, managers should spend time with staff developing their professional and personal well-being - asking staff their training needs, looking ahead to where they see themselves in five/ten years time, and then helping them to achieve this. This symbolic gesture by management shows that they are taking the time to listen to the needs of the staff, getting to know staff, and helping them to achieve their goals. It is also about transparency - that is, acknowledging the constraints within which the organisation has to operate, but working together to come up with innovative and satisfying ways to support and foster personal and professional growth. The workforce, in partnership with consumers and carers, is at the heart of achieving a recovery-oriented service system.

## Increasing the professionalism of staff

There is a strong need to increase specialist recovery-oriented, community-based mental health skills across the sector and ensure uptake of an acceptable voluntary minimum standard qualification and/or qualifications. It is important that organisations have the structures in place to allow for skill expansion so that workers remain within the organisation and committed to their job roles. The following information discusses qualifications and possible pathways in community mental health. In order to have coordinated, best practice services, managers need to look at the qualifications, or potential qualifications, of staff.

## Higher education

There are a range of higher education courses available in areas such as, but not limited to, Social Work, Nursing, Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Applied Social Science, Behavioural Health Science, Counselling and Communication, Health Sciences, Management and Governance. Courses are available at the Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate, Graduate Certificate, Diploma or Graduate Diploma level. It is a case of contacting the relevant institution for further information and course outlines.

## Vocational education

Vocational Education Training (VET) is vocational/skill-based, and as such, provides a wonderful opportunity for managers to sit down with their employees, and speak directly about their job roles and responsibilities to identify competencies they are already using and competencies they would like to develop. The focus is on the work they do, and supporting workers to do their job well. Managers can then recognise current competencies and suggest particular training for further development which may be vocationally based and part of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

### Australian Qualifications Framework

The first agreed framework, called the Australian Qualifications Framework, (AQF) enables different training organisations throughout Australia to issue the same type of qualifications. The same rules apply throughout Australia. The AQF can be summarised as being:

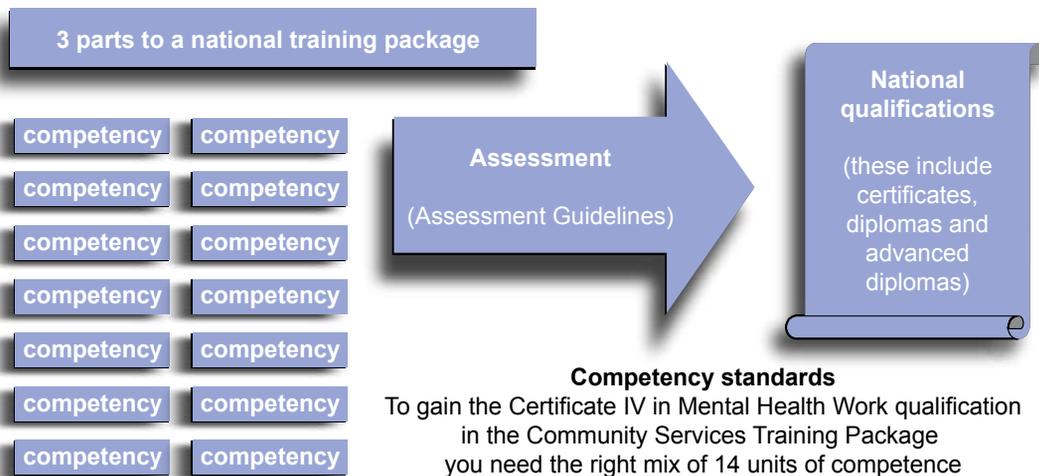
AQF Level	Relevant qualification
AQF 1	Certificate I
AQF 2	Certificate II
AQF 3	Certificate III
AQF 4	Certificate IV
AQF 5	Diploma
AQF 6	Advanced Diploma
AQF 7+	Higher Education Qualifications

## Australian Quality Training Framework

The second agreed framework called the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) enables different assessors throughout Australia to accept the assessments of each other, because they follow the same rules and assess to the same standards. It also enables people to gain a qualification through the skills recognition assessment process.

## National Training Packages

The third agreed framework, called National Training Packages, enables specific workplace competencies to be identified across all industries in Australia. This means that, in those industry areas where national workplace competencies have been identified, a participant can be assessed against them by a qualified assessor. The Community Services Training Package CHC02 is most relevant for the community mental health sector and includes the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work (non-clinical) CHC41102.



Outcomes can be decided by the worker, who, for example, can achieve a Statement of Attainment following successful completion of competence units or pursue a more formal qualification such as the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work.

## The Certificate IV in Mental Health Work (non-clinical)

The Certificate IV in Mental Health Work has been agreed to by MHCC member organisations as the accepted voluntary minimum training standard for front line workers in community mental health services. There are a range of Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) available to assist workers to complete the qualification through a variety of pathways including recognition of prior learning and course-based delivery. The National Training Information Service (NTIS) provides a list of RTO's who currently offer the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work [[www.ntis.gov.au](http://www.ntis.gov.au)]

## Financial assistance for your organisation

Mental Health Work Traineeships are now available for health and community services in NSW. The State and Federal Government offer traineeship options to assist your workforce to become skilled and qualified to achieve the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work. Traineeships are a fantastic way of attracting new entrants to the sector by providing career and learning pathways that lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Existing workers may also be eligible for a Government incentive to complete the mental health qualification. To find out more about traineeships visit [<http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>] or [<http://apprenticeship.det.nsw.edu.au>]

## How to complete the qualification

There will be varied pathways to achieve the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work depending on the RTO. The key concept is to allow for flexible practice. Some of the possible pathways are:

### Course pathway

Most suited to someone with no qualification and little experience. This option includes training, assessment and workplace based projects.

### Blended Pathway - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Training

Most suited to someone with some qualifications and experience who needs to attend some training. This option includes collection of evidence, training and assessment.

### Full RPL

Most suited to an experienced worker who may have some qualification(s). This option includes collection of evidence, e.g. work documents and may also include completion of assessment tasks (individual units only).

## Pathways to other VET qualifications in the Community Services Training Package (2002)<sup>1</sup>

Certificates	Diploma	Advanced Diploma
Certificate IV in Community Mental Health Work	Diploma of Community Services Management Diploma of Community Welfare work Diploma of Community Services (Case Management) Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling)	Advanced Diploma of Community Services Management Advanced Diploma of Community Services Work*

\*Please note that there are no prerequisite requirements for course entry except the Advanced Diploma of Community Services Work, which is based on work experience.

## Education in Practice

The stories below are designed to illustrate how higher education and vocational education can be made relevant to the community mental health sector for people at various entry points in to the sector, and with a range of experience levels and professional goals.

*James is 26 years old. He completed a TAFE course in Community Services 8 years ago, and recently undertook a traineeship to complete the Certificate IV in Mental Health, through a combination of RPL and coursework. He approached his manager because he wanted to pursue higher studies in mental health, and eventually child and adolescent psychology.*

Where to from here?

James was able to enter directly into a Bachelor of Behavioural Health Science, which he completed whilst balancing part-time work. He is now eligible to enrol in a Master of Health Science (Child & Adolescent Health).

1 Note that this training package is currently under review. The 2009 Community Services Training Package will include a new Diploma in Community Services Practice with a mental health and/or substance use specialisation as well as new "skill sets" for identifying and responding to people with mental health or substance use problems.

*Carol is a Manager, with 30 plus years of sector experience. She has seen the changing face of mental health, and is working with more clients with Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) issues. Carol wanted recognition for her managerial skills, but needed up-skilling in working with AOD client.*

Where to from here?

Carol was able to complete the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work by full RPL, including an elective in working with consumers with mental health and AOD issues, and then go on to complete a Graduate Diploma in Health Management. Carol is now interested in pursuing health management studies at a Masters level, and she meets requirements to do this.

*Sue is 34 years old, worked as a Community Mental Health Worker for 5 years, and has a background in nursing. She is currently working in a HASI program and wanted to receive a formal qualification.*

Where to from here?

Sue was able to complete a Certificate IV in Mental Health Work, with the support of her workplace, through RPL.

*Rob is 21 years old, he recently completed a university degree in Psychology. He has had some work experience in a private mental health organisation. He wants to gain further experience across a range of activities. He is attracted to the idea of receiving training whilst at work, as he wants to enter the workforce.*

Where to from here?

Although Rob was uncertain about completing the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work, he recognised that he needed practical skills in mental health work. He was able to receive some RPL and completed the rest of the qualification through face to face training. He was able to incorporate training with learning-on-the-job.

*Matt is 27 years old, from a CALD background, completed a Certificate III in Disability 8 years ago and is currently working with people from CALD backgrounds. He would like to increase his skills and knowledge in working with people from Aboriginal and Indigenous backgrounds.*

Where to from here?

Matt was a good candidate/eligible for a traineeship - he completed the Certificate IV in Mental Health Work via full course attendance. In addition, his manager was able to find a short course on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which Matt completed.

## Individual performance management

It is important that there are clear policies and procedures in place which address performance management issues, including the required probationary period for workers and the conditions of employment. In the event of poor performance or unacceptable behaviour, managers need to be clear on the disciplinary action to be taken. Disciplinary action is required by an employer to correct actions that are not in accordance with organisation policies or customs. It may occur as a response to any form of misconduct.

A good job description should cover agreed performance outcomes and planned professional goals for the individual worker. Performance standards and review needs to be built in to the policies and procedures manual of the organisation. A regular review process of job descriptions and roles should happen at least twice a year, and an individual appraisal should be conducted on an annual basis . Reflective practice engages workers in a kind of individual performance management through a continuous process of considering one's own experience of applying knowledge to practice, and learning from experience.

A key question for managers to ask in developing a performance management program is - 'Are your performance management processes compatible with the organisation's vision and mission?' That is, are the skills, attributes and demonstrated behaviours that you are 'check-listing' in individual staff appraisal in keeping with the organisation's culture and goals?

There are several ways to assess and monitor staff performance. These include:

- Supervision and support processes;
- Probationary period and annual appraisal;
- Staff surveys;
- Training attendance rolls;
- Training Needs Analysis; and,
- Observation.



### **Workplace example - New Horizons Enterprises Ltd**

New Horizons Enterprises Ltd is a not-for-profit, NGO providing a wide range of community support services. New Horizons Enterprises has been in operation since 1981 and have experienced massive growth particularly over the last five years. We currently support over 2000 people.

Due to organisational expansion across NSW we have appointed a Learning & Development Officer to assist with identifying training needs and to provide specific training opportunities to staff. Training needs are mapped through monthly supervision meetings, annual performance appraisals and/or via requests from staff and supervisors.

It is important to note that when implementing a professional/career development plan it should not only reflect the needs of staff, legislative and organisation requirements but also the changing needs of the people we support.

We are currently supporting 65 employees to gain formal qualifications. Of the 65 traineeships being managed, 80% are undertaking Certificate IV Mental Health Work, which we consider to be an entry level requirement.

New Horizons is proud to launch the Inaugural Mental Health Support Workers Conference 'Building Resilience'. This initiative was spearheaded by our HASI (Housing Accommodation Support Initiative) State Manager. The aim of the conference is to provide "Frontline Support Workers" with an opportunity to learn from sector leaders, network with one another, share their experiences and promote best practice.

New Horizons is also involved in a number of consumer research and development projects.

In summary, New Horizons aims to provide training that is not only linked to various roles but that hopefully enhances job satisfaction and increases industry skills and knowledge.