

The Project Air Strategy for Personality Disorders



Health

The expansion of the *Project AIR* strategy forms an important part of the NSW Government Mental Health Reform in developing a more responsive system.

Personality disorder is a term used to describe personality traits when they have become extreme, inflexible and maladaptive. This tends to create a pattern of problems that cause the person and those around them significant distress over a period of time. It is thought that around 7-11% of the Australian population suffer from this pattern of problems at any given point in time.

Personality disorders can be treated. Specific psychological treatments provided by mental health professionals have been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms and improve life functioning.

The Project Air team, based at the University of Wollongong, works together with Local Health District staff to improve the capacity of mental health, drug and alcohol and emergency department services to manage and treat personality disorders. The Project Air strategy improves referral pathways between generic and specialist treatment; develops specialist treatment options; and delivers education and supervision programs.

A pilot of Project Air was run in the Illawarra Shoalhaven and South Eastern Sydney Local Health Districts and across the Justice and Forensic Mental Health Network, demonstrating excellent outcomes. As part of the NSW Government's reform of mental health services, Project Air is being expanded across NSW commencing with Northern Sydney, South Western Sydney and Central Coast Local Health Districts.

What is Project Air?

Project Air is a service development and training program that helps health services to diagnose, manage and provide effective treatment for people with personality disorders. The program involves training for staff and carers in order to ensure that personality disorders are recognised and responded to in an appropriate way. The program includes the family or carer as an important part of service provision and it works across the different parts of the health system including emergency departments to help establish clear, connected pathways to evidence-based treatment.

Implementation

Project Air has proven very successful at pilot sites, with an evaluation of the pilot program demonstrating:

- significant improvements in the mental health of those undergoing treatment
- frontline staff become more confident at recognizing and treating personality disorders
- personality disorder admissions and length of stays in hospitals significantly reduced following implementation of Project Air.
- family and carers reported increased confidence, enthusiasm, and willingness to remain carers.

Following this success, Project Air is now being implemented across the rest of NSW, starting with Northern Sydney, South West Sydney and Central Coast Local Health Districts.

As part of this expansion, these Local Health Districts are working to engage leaders, hold strategic meetings with senior clinicians and conduct training sessions.

To learn more about mental health care reform in NSW visit

www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/reform

