



Substance
Misuse
Limestone
Coast

Global Problems, Local Solutions

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SMLC REGIONAL SUMMIT HEARS MORE FUNDING, SERVICE COLLABORATION REQUIRED

A lack of ongoing funding and collaboration between services are two of the major barriers to collaboration of Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) and mental health services, said delegates attending Substance Misuse Limestone Coast's (SMLC) second Limestone Coast Alcohol and Other Drug Regional Summit.

Sixty-five clinicians, agency executives and service managers attended the summit in Mount Gambier on Thursday, a 40 per cent rise in attendees from the 2021 summit.

SMLC Project Manager Sophie Bouchier said the day was an overwhelming success, with delegates hearing from local and national guest speakers and putting forward their own experiences around the current AOD landscape in a workshop scenario.

"The theme of the day was comorbidity – where there are two or more diagnosed disorders that require treatment at the same time – and in this context, substance use disorders and mental health disorders," Ms Bouchier said.

"Our keynote speaker, Dr Melinda Beckwith, spoke about the fact that at least one in two people accessing AOD treatment experience a co-occurring mental health condition, and how comorbidity needs to inform appropriate models of treatment.

"We also heard from Dr Beckwith that co-occurring disorders usually interact in such a way that treatment for one is likely to be compromised by the effects of the other disorder, if they are not treated at the same time."

Currently in South Australia, Ms Bouchier said, AOD treatment is siloed from mental health treatment.

"We learned from Dr Beckwith's presentation that often, detox from the substance will happen first, based on the belief that psychotherapy is then ineffective on people dependant on the substance.

"What should happen is a comprehensive, continuous and integrated system of care, where services, clinicians and care providers can work together provide treatment for both disorders at the same time, under one case formulation and recovery plan.

"Delegates also highlighted the lack of prescribing GPs for opioid dependence, creating a ripple effect and placing all drug and alcohol agencies under pressure."

Other points raised were a need to address the lack of communication around existing services; and also, practitioners reporting patients were unable to get mental health care plans to begin treatment, leading them to step away from treatment.

Acting CEO of WRAD Health Mark Powell also presented at the event, explaining their evidence-based model success in Warrnambool, and how it works in a regional context.

Following Mr Powell's presentation, delegates strongly expressed a need for a similar agency for the Limestone Coast region.

SANDAS Executive Officer Michael White praised local services Uniting Communities home-based detox service and their newly funded rehabilitation bed service, along with the Mount Gambier & Districts Health Service alcohol and drug detox beds.

The summit was attended by Minister for Regional Industries Clare Scriven, representing Minister for Health Chris Picton, Member for Mount Gambier Troy Bell and Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Industries Ben Hood and Cross-Border Commissioner for South Australia Liz McKinnon.

Now the summit is over, Ms Bouchier said SMLC's work begins.

"SMLC will now collate all the data and report on those main points raised during the summit and begin to communicate and advocate to those key decision makers about those needs identified for the region."

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