Covid-19 Drug and Alcohol Service Evaluation (DASE): Key Messages

Keeping some remote delivery may help to improve efficiency, reduce waiting and improve the service user experience.

Some people prefer in-person support; others may need services to go to them; at home or where they are.

A mixed approach provides another way to tailor services to meet needs - supports trauma-informed care.

Some aspects of service delivery need to stay in-person as they don't work well remotely.

KEY MESSAGE

A mixed offer combining in-person and remote services is best - here's what needs to be considered

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Remote service options and fewer medication pick-ups could be useful for recognising progress with recovery.

Remote options increase engagement for some (e.g. full-time workers, carers).

A number of service user characteristics should be considered in deciding on who might benefit from remote services; mental and physical health; resources; vulnerability; readiness to access support; preferences.

In-person support needs to happen early to build trust and the therapeutic alliance; those who receive remote support need regular in-person wellbeing checks.

Service provider organisations may need to invest further to support future mixed service offers. Private physical space at services is still needed for remote services and more equipment may be needed.

Some service users lack the physical resources to access support; this might be a laptop or smart phone or it might be money for bus fare.

KEY MESSAGE

Resourcing a mixed service offer needs consideration: here's what staff and service users' experiences identified

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Remote support may require more staff than in-person; for example, an extra worker is often needed to facilitate online groups.

Some people may lack skills or confidence to engage with services remotely or they may struggle with keeping and getting to appointments.

Staff may need training and support to manage a mixed service offer well. Formalising the service provider approach will help staff to be clear about what should happen.

The ability to engage with support services remotely (e.g privacy at home) or in-person can be affected by the extent of social support available to the service user

Staff routinely working from home when conducting administrative tasks had few downsides for service users yet offered benefits such as greater work flexibility and increased efficiency and productivity for staff.

Staff greatly valued being trusted to work from home during the pandemic.

The feasibility of home working depends on the specific role carried out by the staff member and their personal circumstances, but it is important that staff feel they are being treated equitably.

Offering home working opportunities may be important for staff recruitment and retention in a competitive labour market.

KEY MESSAGE

Home working has implications for staff, teams, service users, and organisations – here's what needs to be considered

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Some office-based working is useful for team working, information-sharing, signposting, team cohesion, and peer support – opportunities for office-based working should be maintained even where home working is allowed.

Working from home full-time can lead to difficulties balancing work and family life - employers can help staff get the right balance by having clear expectations, guidance, and policies around home working.

Allowing home working may help organisations to manage demand for building and parking space.

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Flexibility is the key – as the circumstances change, the organisation needs to be agile and able to adapt quickly.

It is important to be open to new ideas; what seemed impossible prior to the 'event' might now be necessary.

Large service providers will be unlikely to maintain effective service delivery on their own – working closely with smaller partner organisations, such as those who work with specific priority groups, is likely to be essential.

Some services or service user groups may need to be prioritised. Service providers need good quality service and service user data to make and action effective decisions about this.

KEY MESSAGE

Service providers need to plan for future 'low-chance, high-impact' events – here's what this study suggests is important

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Clear leadership is required when a 'high impact' event occurs – staff and service users need to feel that 'the ship is steady'.

Strong, pre-existing relationships and partnership/joint working practices help ensure that a range of skills and resources are available to deal with the challenges of the 'event'.

Forward planning is vital and 'scenario planning' may be beneficial.

Those with the most relevant expertise and specialist knowledge should be involved in response planning and decision-making – this should include frontline staff as well as managers.

Service providers need to assess resource and infrastructure needs ahead of an event occurring; what might be required to maintain services to the most 'vulnerable' service users if a high impact event occurs?