

Exploring the role of community pharmacy in supporting mental health consumers and carers

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Key Findings

A mixed methods approach was used to explore the role of community pharmacy in supporting mental health consumers and carers. In total, 702 consumers and carers, 430 pharmacists, 217 support staff and 35 health professionals/support staff from three regions of Australian participated in one or more stages of the research.

1. Consumers with mental health problems and their carers want pharmacy to be a safe health space that respects their privacy, minimises stigma and promotes trusting relationships with all pharmacy staff. Consumers and carers emphasised the need for these patient centred pharmacy services throughout.

2. Pharmacy staff need to have positive attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence to support and work with consumers and their carers in a proactive way via patient centred services. On-line education improved pharmacy staff attitudes, knowledge, communication skills and confidence in working with mental health consumers and carers. Consumers and carers reported increased expectations of pharmacy services.

3. Pharmacy staff are in an ideal position to promote pharmacy as a health hub to empower consumers and their carers through regular contact and by providing information on medications and health support services. Mental health consumers and carers were frequent pharmacy users, providing regular opportunities for engagement with and support from staff, including connections to local services.

4. Tailored training and ongoing support equips pharmacy staff with high-level communication skills and effective intervention strategies to provide complex services for vulnerable populations. Implementing medication support services requires training and tools that provide experiential learning, change management strategies and ongoing access to consumer or carer and pharmacy educator mentor teams.

5. A mental health medication support service that is ongoing, goal-oriented, flexible and individualised, improves consumer outcomes such as illness perception, satisfaction with treatment, as well as positive lifestyle change. Consumers were more motivated and confident about managing their mental health, reporting positive health outcomes and raised expectations of pharmacy services.

6. Effective implementation of a mental health medication support service relies on a whole-of-pharmacy approach (incorporating everyone from support staff through to owners and managers) that is practical and appropriately resourced. Buy-in from all levels and service integration was associated with benefits for consumers, staff and improved pharmacy image. Some participants intended to continue the service and adapt it to other chronic conditions.

Overall, this research revealed that community pharmacy is ideally situated for providing patient centred mental health services to support consumers and carers with common illnesses such as depression and anxiety. For further details see Full Final Report, Section 5 pg. 145.