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Countering Stagnation in a Complex Environment: Shoring up professional identity among aged care assessors

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The Aged Care Assessment Program

- “we really try and keep people at home with support as much as possible. Try and give them **quality of life and safety and security**”

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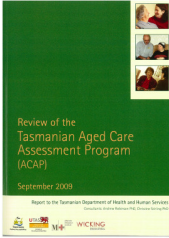
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2009 Review of the ACAP in Tasmania

Ongoing program of review and evaluation of ACAP, at state and the national levels.

Team commissioned to review ACAT efficiency and effectiveness across some specific areas of performance. Our approach was to look at:

- performance within each ACAT
- comparison between Teams and with available benchmarks and guidelines
- the demand for services, ACAT processes and outputs and future trends



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Informed by

- Tasmanian and national program data set
- Interviews and focus groups with Team members
- Observation and Team document analysis
- Previous reviews

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“Stagnation”
 Increased demand + higher benchmarks = no time for community or professional engagement

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“We’re not just assessors” – bolstering professional identity

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Via professional paperwork

Via “outside the rules” case management

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Under pressure and isolated

- Pressure to increase rate of assessments
- More and new types of client
- Insufficient triage
- A highly stressed, and underinformed client group

Isolated from communities and from professional peers



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Under pressure ...

- burgeoning target population
- new client types—"The aged care industry is now the *de facto* detox and long term residential rehab for alcoholics in Tasmania"
- pressure to increase rate of assessment: risk of **"squeezing out the caring"**
- "we're being pulled from pillar to post just to try and keep our heads down so we don't get them chopped off!"



Tasmanian ACATs completed 6299 assessments in 2007–2008, **up 36%** from 2003, with **only a 10%** increase in assessor FTEs

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and isolated

- "we're in a **very contested space**" ... "you're always in that space where you're the visitor in a sense because **you don't belong anywhere**"
- "that's what I'm finding **quite grinding** the last year or so ... you begin to think how much more of this can you take when people don't see the bigger perspective"


 

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with limited opportunities for professional development

- "It just makes you feel that you're **working in isolation**"
- "Staff development is **just a nightmare** for us to try and get it"
- "Professional development is **non existent**, I went to a conference this year. It's the first paid training I've been to—on the proviso that I paid for my meals, accommodation and airfares!"



 


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So how is professional identity maintained?

Keeping professional notes – the Client Profile.



- For some, the Client Profile guides the assessment, records a rich picture of the client, and creates a 'paper trail' of the assessment process and outcomes. "It's **good clinical practice** – that sums up the profile!"


 

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and care beyond the call...



- "I spent a long time coordinating and rushing around all the services [in town]. And I went back last Friday to see her and spent half an hour and had a cup of tea with her ... It was for **my own peace of mind** to know that she was actually alright and that everything I'd organised had fallen into place and that she was safe."
- "Because we deal with the frail, the vulnerable, those people that are older that are a lot of times in very compromised situations. That little **extra bit of reassurance** sometimes can mean the difference between things going well and not going well!"


 

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Making connections

- "I think part of professional development is **networking** and ... primary health care grass roots stuff ... just **getting out there** in the community and people coming up to talk to you about aged care"
- "I think we've become quite **task orientated** in that we are producing fairly efficiently assessment outcomes ... but I think we've lost some opportunities for professional development and growth in our own professions and as assessors"



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Ways forward

The assessors themselves saw opportunities:


- “I think that we have an opportunity ... with the level of experience and education we have and the knowledge ... **to share that with other service providers and with client groups** and then that would help people better understand [our role] and it would help with referrals perhaps being more appropriate”
- I just want more time available really to be able to get out there and interact with interagency meetings ... to be able to be **in the community** to do education forums, participate in conferences, expos, and **give a positive light on ageing”**



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THANK YOU

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