

New resource for people with alcohol problems

Niamh Foley and Nicola Perry describe an initiative that highlights referral pathways and resources for patients with alcohol problems



THE COMMUNITY ALCOHOL DETOX PROJECT is one of 12 strategic initiatives launched in 2019 to address priorities set out in the National Drug Strategy. This is a cross-taskforce initiative involving: Dublin south inner city, the canal communities, Ballyfermot and Dublin 12 local drug and alcohol taskforces, with Community Response as the host organisation. Community Response is a primary alcohol and liver health service that supports individuals and their families who are impacted by alcohol misuse, based in Dublin city centre.

The aim of the project was to improve the health and well-being of individuals who have alcohol dependence or are engaged in harmful drinking. This project aimed to provide a service to individuals who are trying to manage alcohol dependence in a non-residential setting.

Individuals would in most cases access a community alcohol detox through their GP or primary care provider and avail of community-based support in the form of key working groups or counselling. This project aims to raise awareness of supports available within the community and develop referral pathways between primary care services, general practice, hospitals and other healthcare providers with community organisations/local addiction services.

GP engagement, consultation and feedback has been integral to the development of this project. Over 20 GPs were consulted around their experiences of community alcohol detox. This provided the opportunity to identify barriers when supporting patients to manage their alcohol use, and to identify factors they felt needed to be addressed to improve outcomes. Some of the major barriers presenting from GP consultation were:

- Lack of knowledge of the services community organisations/NGOs provide
- Lack of referral pathways present between GP/healthcare providers and community organisations/NGOs
- Barriers due to stigma for individuals considering use of general addiction services
- The lack of a resource that would outline treatment options, a directory of services and information on referral pathways.

In response to stakeholder consultation and feedback, the Community Alcohol Detox Project developed a manual and a website aimed at addressing barriers to improve referral pathways and create awareness around alcohol supports. *'Make the Change: An Alcohol Reduction Resource'* outlines the resources that were developed as part of this process.

In the public health service, non-residential treatment is free of charge. Addiction treatment services are provided by the HSE Drug and Alcohol Services. Most services listed in our resources are provided by community and voluntary projects funded by the local or regional Drug and Alcohol

Task Forces. This project is committed to reducing the barriers, strengthening referral pathways, and enhancing inter-agency models of practice to ensure that those who are looking to make changes in their alcohol use are being provided the most appropriate level of support. The project identifies that where an individual is engaging in community alcohol detox under the supervision from their GP, the individual is more likely to experience more positive outcomes and abstinence with supports from specialised addiction services.

The manual

The *Community Alcohol Resource Manual* (CAD Manual) offers a best practice framework for alcohol reduction for individuals, family members and professionals. This manual is useful for staff working in specialised addiction services who are providing alcohol-specific interventions. In a clinical setting, the manual can be a useful tool with which to signpost patients if they are concerned about their own or someone else's drinking. It provides information, guidance and workshop questions to prompt individuals to explore their alcohol use. The manual is available to view at makethechange.ie (picture above from website).

The website was developed largely in response to identified needs from GPs, healthcare providers and service users around lack of referral pathways in the community to alcohol supports and to create awareness around what supports are being provided, and where.

This website provides information and guidance for individuals and their families who are looking to make changes in their drinking habits. It also provides guidance and information specific to professionals making referrals on behalf of individuals they are working with. The website includes: alcohol treatment options; a service directory; referral pathway information; information on alcohol reduction; and video resources (for professionals and service users).

There are many individuals presenting to their healthcare providers with physical/mental health-related issues with comorbid substance dependence. This website offers professionals a resource to provide patients with the right information that may be able to support them, whether they require a community alcohol detox or are looking to make changes in their drinking habits.

If you would like physical copies of the manual or copies of posters or leaflets, or if you would like more information on this project or alcohol supports in general, contact Nicola at Email: nicola@communityresponse.ie or Tel: 01 454 9772. 

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