

Sensory Approaches in Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Clinical Capability Framework

Second Edition (2025).

Sensory Approaches in Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Clinical Capability Framework 2nd ed, 2025

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Queensland Health Sensory Approaches in Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs

Clinical Capability Framework

The use of Sensory Approaches in mental health settings aims to teach consumers to use their sensory systems to self-regulate arousal levels and improve participation in meaningful life activities. 'Sensory approaches are a variety of therapeutic strategies involving the senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, vestibular & proprioception). By promoting a person's ability to regulate their emotions in healthy and adaptive ways, sensory approaches have been shown to alter levels of alertness and relieve anxiety and distress. (Statewide Fact Sheet: Sensory Approaches, Queensland Health 2019. PDF attached).

The Sensory Approaches Clinical Capability Framework (Sensory Approaches CCF) provides Occupational Therapy practitioners, professional leaders, managers, and service developers with guidance to inform understanding of the level of training, knowledge and skills required to safely and effectively use sensory approaches in practice. Effective use of the Sensory Approaches CCF will support consistent, evidence informed and quality occupational therapy-led practice, against criteria within skills and knowledge, scope of practice, supervision, and education domains.

The Sensory Approaches CCF will:



Outline knowledge and practice skills that will enable practitioners to develop capability at their current level of practice, and to progress across advancing levels of sensory approached capability



Provide recommendations to guide practitioners, managers, and supervisors in the capabilities required for delivery of safe and effective sensory approaches, that are integrated within mental health alcohol and other drug core skills.



Support reflective practice supervision on sensory approached to deepen and scaffold scope of practice, and foster a culture of growth, quality, and innovation.



Provide a culture of lifelong learning in the development and delivery of sensory approaches across mental health alcohol and other drug services, that also empowers the development of capability in others.

Sensory Approaches CCF Capability Domains



Knowledge Skills



Supervision role



Scope of practice



Education role

Therapeutic support roles

Allied Health Assistants and OT support roles.

Basic understanding and application of SA.

Applies universal tools and delegated work instructions to support SA.

Introductory level training required.

Foundation practitioner

Early career MHAOD OTs.

Introductory understanding of SA and influence on occupational function.

Practice informed practitioner

Developing sensory MHAOD OT.

Applies SA to improve ability to engage in occupation.

Limited SA practice developed and applied under observation o senior colleague.

Ongoing learning.

Practitioner

Established Sensory MHAOD OT.

Broad, specialist knowledge and application of SA assessment and interventions.

Supports SA MDT training and development within local service.

SA reflective practice supervision and specialist training.

Advanced practitioner

Specialist Sensory MHAOD OT.

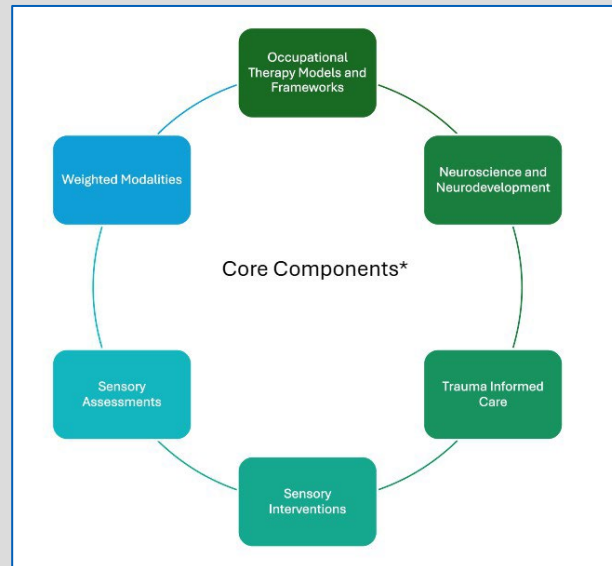
Advanced contemporary skills have been integrated through diverse practice.

Implements OT-led interdisciplinary training across MHAODS.

Leads SA program development and QI

The unique role of Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy uniquely integrates sensory approaches to assess, adapt, and enhance individuals' sensory processing, promoting functional independence, emotional regulation, and participation in daily activities through tailored interventions that address sensory needs across diverse environments. In doing this, an occupational therapist integrates core component of sensory approaches practice, which include neuroscience, trauma-informed care, occupational models, and framework, into specialist sensory assessments and intervention, including weighted modalities. Each of these core components are addressed in the Sensory Approaches CFF.



*Core components refer to the underlying theories, evidence, techniques, and framework that guide and inform the use of sensory approached with people using mental health alcohol and other drugs services. A practitioner's knowledge, skills, reflective practice and confidence in integrating these will increase as they progress across levels in capability.

How to use the Sensory Approaches CCF



Reflect on current sensory approaches capability



Identify learning needs in collaboration with line manager, supervisor, colleagues



Participate in learning and translate into practice



Engage in continuous cycle of review

For further information please email us: OT_sensory_approaches_collaborative@health.qld.gov.au



Sensory Approaches Capability Domain 1: Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge: refers to the theoretical and practical understandings necessary to deliver sensory approaches across levels of specialisation.

Skills: relate to the breadth and depth of sensory-based methods and processes that may be applied safely and effectively in delivery of care.

Note: Experienced OTs transitioning into MHAOD practice may align with levels based on prior sensory approaches experience.

Therapeutic support roles (e.g., AHA, Rec Officer)	Foundation practitioner (Early Career MHAOD OT)	Practice informed practitioner (Developing/ transitional Sensory MHAOD OT)	Practitioner (Established Sensory MHAOD OT)	Advanced practitioner (Specialist Sensory MHAOD OT)
Basic understanding of sensory modulation and aware of aware of sensory modulation calming and alerting strategies.	<p>Introductory level knowledge of sensory approaches and how they influence engagement in occupation. Basic knowledge of treatment options for sensory-based intervention.</p> <p>Able to deliver introductory basic education and therapeutic support for consumers/clients and carers.</p>	<p>Understands how to apply sensory approaches to improve a person's ability to engage in occupation. Able to incorporate these into core MHAOD practice skills.</p> <p>Central focus of role is consolidation of MHAOD core skills, with awareness of how sensory approaches impact a consumer's current clinical presentation.</p> <p>'The occupational therapist understands the role of a sensory profile and when it is required (Domain 2.7., OTA, 2025)'.</p>	<p>Broad knowledge of formal and informal sensory assessments and interventions, and how these link to a person's occupational performance and goals.</p> <p>Skills in specific sensory-based models of assessment and intervention are integrated with practice frameworks and MHAOD core skills.</p>	<p>Advanced, contemporary knowledge and skills training of sensory-based assessment and interventions for practice across developmental stages and in a range of MHAOD settings.</p> <p>The experienced occupational therapist has integrated advanced specialist knowledge and skills to 'provide complex sensory interventions for the most complex consumer/client presentations (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.</p>

Skills to build a therapeutic alliance that will support engagement with sensory-based activities	Introductory level knowledge of Trauma Informed Care and recovery-oriented practices, supportive of a safe and person-centred practice.	Able to evaluate and modify care plans according to individual needs, combining sensory-based practice with connectedness and recovery-oriented principles.	Able to evaluate and refine sensory intervention to further improve outcomes of presenting MHAOD, recovery, and social inclusion. Comprehensive understanding of sensory approaches is demonstrated in relation to evidence informed base.	Advanced knowledge of trauma informed care principles and integrated skills to appropriately tailor intervention to meet needs of complex presentations.
Basic theory and neuroscience of sensory modulation	Introductory level understanding of how sensory-based intervention impacts brain function to support coping behaviours.	'The occupational therapist develops their understanding of sensory modulation interventions and their use as coping strategies that promote emotional self-regulation, distress tolerance, and function (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.	'The occupational therapist has a sound knowledge of how sensory modulation directly effects the autonomic nervous system (the fight, flight, freeze) to quickly alter stress and arousal levels (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.	Maintains an advanced knowledge of neuroscience and related fields, (e.g. predictive processing, functional brain networks). Advanced knowledge is integrated with skills to accommodate for the impact of trauma (e.g. on brain development; risk of re-traumatisation) in intervention.
Aware of sensory modulation treatment precautions for sensory-based activities within scope of role. Safely follows local procedures for sensory-based activities.	Adheres to local guidelines and procedures on sensory approaches to assure that safety and quality of sensory-based interventions are supported within a work unit.	Incorporates local service guidelines and statewide guidelines on sensory approaches into practice.	Participates regularly in ongoing quality activities including peer review, development and evaluation of therapy and reflection on application of relevant procedures.	Develops and advises on sensory approaches guidelines and procedures based on OT practice frameworks, drives evaluation and research. Actively contributes to the development of local and state guidelines, procedures, and policies on sensory approaches.



Sensory Approaches Capability Domain 2: Scope of Practice

Part 1: Autonomy and Support The range of sensory approaches procedures, actions, and processes that may be delivered according to level of capability, and the corresponding levels of support required to care to be delivered safely and effectively.

Therapeutic support roles (e.g. AHA, Rec Officer)	Foundation practitioner (Early career MHAOD OT)	Practice informed practitioner (Developing/transitional Sensory MHAOD OT)	Practitioner (Established Sensory MHAOD OT)	Advanced practitioner (Specialist Sensory MHAOD OT)
<p>Uses a Clinical Task Instruction (CTI)¹ or delegated work task/plan to undertake sensory-based activities within the work unit.</p>	<p>Observation of the sensory profile or sensory checklist being delivered by an occupational therapist. Administration of sensory assessment and intervention is under the direct guidance of a senior practitioner</p>	<p>Administers a 'sensory profile and prescribes a sensory diet, under supervision of a senior colleague as needed, to assist a consumer to manage stimulus levels in a way that allows them to function optimally and to support their mental health and well-being (Domain 2.7., OTA, 2025)'.</p>	<p>Independently administers and interprets formal and informal occupational therapy assessments of sensory processing and specialised sensory modalities.</p>	<p>Provides consultation to teams and practitioners to adapt sensory approaches for consumers/clients with complex clinical presentations.</p>
<p>Provides feedback to treating team following delivery of sensory-based activity and monitors safety and quality processes within the work unit.</p>	<p>Formal or informal training in how to administer sensory assessments.</p>	<p>Assesses the current presentation of a consumer/client/s and the practice setting, before engaging in sensory-based activities, with guidance of a senior practitioner.</p>	<p>Competent development and contextualisation of intervention plans and evaluation, making recommendations and providing feedback to the interdisciplinary team.</p>	<p>Develops processes and procedures including delegated work practices, CTIs for roles across the interdisciplinary team.</p>
	<p>Refers to current sensory intervention plans and consults with treating team before supporting sensory intervention within scope determined by an OT.</p>	<p>Provides feedback to interdisciplinary team, including peer workers about impact of sensory approaches on mental state and behaviour.</p>	<p>Provides support and mentoring for skill development to other members of the interdisciplinary or professional team within a work unit, ranging nursing, AH, medical and peer workers.</p>	<p>Provides leadership, support and mentoring for sensory approaches skill development across MHAODS multidisciplinary and professional teams.</p>



Sensory Approaches Capability Domain 2: Scope of Practice

Part 2: Working with Complexity The range of therapeutic methods and approaches that align with the level of presenting complexity that may be delivered according to the practitioner's level of capability in sensory approaches.

Therapeutic support roles (e.g., AHA, Rec Officer)	Foundation practitioner (Early career MHAOD OT)	Practice informed practitioner (Developing/transitional Sensory MHAOD OT)	Practitioner (Established Sensory MHAOD OT)	Advanced practitioner (Advanced Sensory MHAOD OT)
<p>Uses universal sensory tools and methods specified by occupational therapist in specific settings. (e.g. Crisis Safe Spaces, Withdrawal Units)</p>	<p>Works with consumers/clients under direct supervision to explore and use sensory strategies within the contexts of Sensory Rooms, Sensory Kits, and Sensory Groups.</p>	<p>Works independently with consumers/clients experiencing common presentations.</p>	<p>The occupational therapist works independently with 'a wide range of consumers/clients, drawing on a range of sensory assessment tools including the Child and Adolescent and Adult Sensory Profiles, Sensory Screening Tool, and Sensory Processing Measure (Domain 2.7., OTA, 2025)'.</p>	<p>'The occupational therapist can work with all consumers/clients, regardless of complexity, to complete sensory assessments, develop sensory plans and personal safety plans to optimise function and mental health well-being (Domain 2.7., OTA, 2025)'.</p>
<p>Supports sensory-based activities with a consumer/client/s, under instruction of an Occupational Therapist including:</p>	<p>Supports sensory-based activities with a consumer/client/s, under instruction of an Occupational Therapist including:</p>	<p>Identifies complex presentations, referring to senior practitioner for supervised practice including assessment and intervention.</p>	<p>Delivers a broad range of interventions competently and independently, including:</p>	<p>Advises on interventions and service development for practice settings including:</p>
<p>Supports sensory-based activities with a consumer/client/s, under instruction of an Occupational Therapist including:</p>	<p>Supports sensory-based activities with a consumer/client/s, under instruction of an Occupational Therapist including:</p>	<p>Delivers a limited range of interventions under supervision, including:</p>	<p>Delivers a broad range of interventions competently and independently, including:</p>	<p>Advises on interventions and service development for practice settings including:</p>

<p>Use of a Clinical Task Instruction (CTI)¹ or delegated work task/plan to perform sensory activities that are specific to an intervention setting or consumer/client's treatment plan (e.g., use of weighted blankets²).</p>	<p>Use of a Clinical Task Instruction (CTI)¹ or delegated work task/plan to perform sensory activities that are specific to an intervention setting or consumer/client's treatment plan (e.g., use of weighted blankets²). Observes the development of sensory plans through work shadowing.</p>	<p>'Development of basic sensory plans such as weighted modality plans², based on assessment outcomes with the support of a senior practitioner (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.</p>	<p>Provides advise on resourcing about the safety and utility of materials and equipment for sensory approaches. Undertakes 'risk assessments and prescription of weighted modalities² (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.</p>	<p>'Sensory interventions for the most complex consumer/client presentations (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.</p>
<p>Provides support alongside a consumer/client who is applying a Safety Tool³ (e.g. crisis support plan; personal safety plan,cravings regulation plan for self-soothing.</p>	<p>Apply a Safety Tool³ (e.g. crisis support plan; personal safety plan) to assist consumers/clients to self-soothe and self-regulate.</p>	<p>Applies knowledge of sensory approaches to support consumers/client to develop and adapt their Safety Tools³</p>	<p>Develops sensory diets and sensory plans that support optimal function, mental health well-being and the development of personal safety plan (Domain 2.7., OTA, 2025).</p>	<p>'Development and establishment of sensory spaces within treatment settings and homes where appropriate (Domain 4., OTA, 2025)'.</p>
<p>Co-facilitation of sensory groups with instruction provided by an Occupational Therapist.</p>	<p>Co-facilitation of sensory groups with instruction provided by an Occupational Therapist.</p>	<p>Is a lead facilitator of sensory groups and develops group sessions in consultation with senior practitioners.</p>	<p>Develops, co-ordinates and evaluates individual and group programs that have sensory-based components. Incorporates lived experience perspective and model for co-facilitation with peer workers, into session design.</p>	<p>Develops service wide programs for sensory approaches with consultation across the interdisciplinary team, lived experience workforce and cultural capability specialists. Coordinates quality and evaluation activities.</p>

1. Delegated work practice and Clinical Task Instructions

'Allied health assistants, Recreation Officers and other allied health support roles are valued members of the multidisciplinary team and work under the supervision and delegation of allied health professionals. They contribute to service delivery through supporting the provision of allied health care delivered to either individuals or through group sessions, (Queensland Health, 2025).

[Allied Health Assistants and Delegation | Queensland Health](#) .

Queensland Health has developed a number of [Clinical Task Instructions](#) (CTIs) which may be used for training and competency assessment and also for monitoring and governance of the delegated or skill-shared task.

Go to the 'Useful Resources' section for further links to resources and training about delegated work practice and CTIs.

2. Weighted modalities

'Weighted blankets and other weighted items are used to apply deep pressure to the body. Small plastic pellets are distributed evenly inside the blanket to provide pressure across the body. Other weighted items include vests, cushions, shoulder wraps and stuffed toys. The deep pressure applied by weighted modalities has a grounding effect that lowers states of arousal when too alert or raises states of arousal when too calm. Applied deep pressure also tells the brain where our body parts are in space (proprioception) to reduce anxiety and help with symptoms of dissociation (Queensland Health,2019) .'

[Insight - Resources - Fact sheet: Sensory Approaches in Mental Health](#)

There are safety precautions for using weighted modalities and training is required before they are applied. Please speak to an OT for morning information on training option.

Go to the 'Useful Resources' section for an example 'Plan for use of a weighted blanket'

3. Safety Tool

These tools may also be called Personal Safety Plan, Crisis Intervention Plan and so on. This type of document is developed in collaboration with the consumer and the staff member to identify early warning signs, triggers, and sensory based strategies to regulate emotions during times of crisis or dysregulation.

Go to the 'Useful Resources' section at the end of the Sensory Approaches CCF for embedded tools and links for all levels of practice.



Sensory Approaches Capability Domain 3: Supervision Role

The process of engagement in receiving supervision and providing supervision, about sensory-based practice. Most commonly, sensory-based supervision happens as part of a broader supervision agreement.

Therapeutic support roles (e.g., AHA, Rec Officers)	Foundation practitioner (Early career MHAOD OT)	Practice informed practitioner (Developing/transitional Sensory MHAOD OT)	Practitioner (Established Sensory MHAOD OT)	Advanced practitioner (Specialist Sensory MHAOD OT)
Accesses work-shadowing, mentoring and / or group supervision on sensory approaches with experienced sensory approaches practitioners.	<p>Receives individual supervision and / or mentoring with an experienced Occupational Therapy sensory approaches practitioner.</p> <p>Receives core professional and clinical practice supervision as relevant to role.</p> <p>MHAOD core practice skills endorsed by performance coaching and appraisal process.</p>	<p>Receives frequent individual reflective practice supervision from a senior occupational therapist which supports development of competency in sensory approaches scope of practice.</p> <p>Applied sensory approaches practice is always accompanied by direct observation and supervision.</p>	<p>Receives ongoing and routine reflective practice supervision from a specialist sensory approaches practitioner. Individual and peer supervision supports development in specialist sensory approaches scope of practice.</p> <p>Engages with specialist forums such as the Mental Health Occupational Therapy Sensory Approaches Clinical Group</p> <p>Provides supervision, mentoring and work-shadowing to students, foundation, and practice informed practitioners.</p>	<p>Receives routine sensory approaches practice supervision with an advanced sensory approaches practitioner or peer group. Supervision includes a supervision of supervision function.</p> <p>Engages with specialist forums such as Mental Health Occupational Therapy Sensory Approaches Clinical Group.</p> <p>Provides supervision, mentoring and work-shadowing to practitioners of all capability levels. Develops supervision protocol.</p>



Sensory Approaches Capability Domain 4: Education

Education: *Participation in evidence-informed learning and development activities that facilitate capability and/or competency in sensory approaches. Engagement may be as a learner or facilitator of education.*

Therapeutic support roles (e.g., AHA, Rec Officers)	Foundation practitioner (Early career MHAOD OT)	Practice informed practitioner (Developing/transitional Sensory MHAOD OT)	Practitioner (Established Sensory MHAOD OT)	Advanced practitioner (Specialist Sensory MHAOD OT)
<p>Practitioners have completed a current and evidence informed online introductory training package in sensory approaches.</p> <p>An initial briefing to sensory approaches by an occupational therapist has also been received.</p> <p>The recommended training is the eLearning module: 'QC42 Introduction to Sensory Approaches', hosted by Queensland Centre for Mental Health Learning.</p>	<p>Practitioners have completed a current and evidence informed online introductory training package in sensory approaches.</p> <p>Engages in self-directed learning, reflection, and knowledge of current evidence-informed practice. Meets professional registration and credentialing requirements.</p> <p>The recommended training is the eLearning module: 'QC42 Introduction to Sensory Approaches', hosted by Queensland Centre for Mental Health Learning.</p>	<p>Education in sensory approaches is provided by OTs of a Practitioner or Advanced practitioner level.</p> <p>Engages in self-directed learning, reflection, and knowledge of current evidence-informed practice.</p> <p>Provides basic education to less knowledgeable occupational therapists and foundation practitioners.</p>	<p>Attainment of specialist training in sensory approaches, based on current best evidence.</p> <p>Competency has been built through applied practice and reflective supervision over time, across a range of MHAOD consumer/client presentations and settings</p> <p>Provides education and training to less experienced practitioners.</p>	<p>Engages with leading professional practice forums in sensory approaches, to sustain peak quality and emerging capabilities.</p> <p>Competency has been built through extensive applied practice, individual supervision, and reflective peer group practice, over time.</p> <p>Delivers education and training in sensory approaches, including train-the-trainer programs.</p>

Sensory Resources:

What are Sensory Approaches?

Statewide Factsheet: Sensory Approaches (Queensland Health, 2019) 

Universal learning packages for MHAOD sensory approaches

Insight

[Sensory Approaches for Alcohol and Other Drug Practice](#)

Video and webinar resources from the Insight sensory toolkit include:

Webinars

- Addicted to the sunshine: The role of sensory inputs and occupations in substance use and treatment
- New Toolkits for Trauma Informed Care and Sensory Approaches
- One size (doesn't) fit all: Exploring ways to support people who use substances to build and strengthen self-regulation skills
- A little less conversation, a little more action

Video

- Ways to explain and explore sensory approaches, its benefits and application in AOD practice
- Some popular sensory items and strategies
- Ways to embed sensory approaches as part of routines, habits, environments, and everyday activities
- A guide to the 'Using Your Senses to Cope' tool

The adjunct Introductory training in the Sensory Approaches CCF is:

Queensland Centre for Mental Health Learning 'QC 42 Introduction to Sensory Approaches'

[Learning Centre](#)

Key References and Resources for occupational therapists

Brown, A., Tse, T., & Fortun, T. (2019). Defining sensory modulation: A review of the concept and a contemporary definition for application by occupational therapists. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 26(7), 515–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2018.1509370>

OTA Mental Health Clinical Capability Framework (2025)

- [Mental Health Capability Framework](#)

OT Innovations (ot-innovations.com)

- [Welcome to OT-Innovations - OT-Innovations](#)



Queensland Health MHAOD Sensory Approaches Sharepoint (accessible via QHEPs)

Access the sensory approaches community of practice and a wide range of resources and education here at the Mental Health Occupational Therapy Sensory Approaches Clinical Collaborative (MHOTSACC):

- [Mental Health Occupational Therapy Clinical Practice Collaborative \(MHOTCPC\)](#)


Safety Tools

Insight universal safety tools: Tools for use by all workers to support consumers with understanding how to cope:

- [Insight - Resources - Using Your Senses to Cope - Sensory tool for clients](#)
- Zones of Regulation: tool for intervention and planning with consumers 
- Personal Safety Plan 

Sensory based assessments and interventions

Broad range of OT training in assessment and intervention

- [All Products - Sensory Integration Education](#)
- Sensory Checklist 

Sensory Connection Program


- [The Sensory Connection Program uses sensory approaches to treatment for psychosocial self-care by Karen M. Moore](#)

Sensory Profile

- [Adolescent / Adult Sensory Profile | Pearson Clinical Assessment AU&NZ](#)

Weighted modalities

Tina Champagnes' website. A range of resources and literature are available.

- [The Therapeutic Use of Weight - OT-Innovations](#)
- Weighted modality plan 

Clinical Task Instructions and delegated work practice

- [Allied Health Assistant and Delegation Training Package | Queensland Health](#)
- [Guidelines for developing and writing clinical task instructions](#)

Note: examples of CTIs for sensory approaches delegated work practice are pending, late 2025

Acknowledgements:

The following Frameworks were used with permission to inform the development of the Sensory Approaches in Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Clinical Capability Framework, 2nd edition (2025):

- Queensland Health Occupational Therapy Clinical Capability Framework:
https://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0041/1891877/otccf-framework.pdf
- Therapy Capability and Practice Framework, Addiction and Mental Health Services, Metro South Hospital and Health Service:
http://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/metrosouthmentalhealth/docs/therapy_framework.pdf
Special thanks to the Therapies Oversight Committee, Metro South Addiction and Mental Health Services.