

# Drugs, alcohol and nurses' mental health



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Drug and alcohol use can become a compelling health issue for nurses themselves, as it is across the community (Monroe and Kenega 2011).

The Nursing and Midwifery Health Program (NMHP) since its inception has sought to provide support and assistance for nurses with issues relating to substance use and more recently with high prevalence mental health concerns. The program also delivers a campaign of health promotion, designed to de-stigmatise these problems and highlight positive health messages.

Prior to NMHP, no health promotion efforts targeted nurses specifically, despite a comprehensive body of literature on the persistent and profound stressors in nursing work (Safe Work Australia 2010; Lillibridge et al 2002). NMHP health promotion aims to reduce the experience of stress for nurses and their link to alcohol and drug use while working to normalise help seeking behaviours.

## Intervention

The health promotion messages NMHP convey include strategies for self-care which are sensitive to nurses' contexts. NMHP, staffed by nurses, recognises nursing work is a multiple set of interactions and pressures which are best understood by other nurses. This awareness has enabled specific and strategic information to be offered to nurses across the state.

## Data

Over five years of operation, NMHP staff has engaged with thousands of nurses in clinical

and management roles. Health promotion events increase awareness and nurses are actively engaged through workshops.

Promotional Activity [Aug 2010 – July 2011]	Number of events	Number of participants
Hospitals & HR	39	4,326
Universities	10	890
Peer Support, Other Health Care Providers and Unions	13	1,450
Conferences	23	6,100
Total	85	12,766

Web stats April 2011-May 2012	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages viewed
Total	2,743	4,394	17,980

## Conclusion

NMHP has worked across Victoria with nurses, midwives, employers and the Nurses Board of Victoria and Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency since its inception, to assist when health issues arise and to promote health and self-care for nurses. An external evaluation of the service currently underway shows the service has been extremely well received, with the majority of clients self-referring.

A typical client evaluation reads: "The most useful experience for me was the ability to talk with another nurse who understood where I was coming from and as a professional, was

able to offer me insights into what I could do and what resources were available to me."

The care and health promotion for nurses by NMHP has the scope to act as a model for similar services nationally.

## REFERENCES

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