

Empowering people with choices to get back on track

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- Ground-breaking new program providing supportive intervention to vulnerable and disadvantaged people being discharged from emergency departments and justice services.
- Peer workers help people in crisis to access supports such as accommodation and treatment for mental health, alcohol and other drug issues.
- Targets underlying issues that contribute to repeat presentations and poor health.

The Choices discharge program is connecting vulnerable and disadvantaged people with critical social and mental health support as they are discharged from justice services and emergency departments at Royal Perth and Rockingham Hospitals.

The pilot program is the brain child of the WA Primary Health Alliance, who recognised vulnerable people can have intertwined contact with hospital and police services and can often be caught in a cycle of re-presentation due to a range of underlying social issues and unmet basic needs.

WA Primary Health Alliance and RUAH Community Services have co-designed a service model that is delivered by RUAH's peer workers who draw on their lived experience in similar situations to provide supportive intervention.

This includes crucial access to mental health services, alcohol and drug services and other essentials, including crisis accommodation.

WA Primary Health Alliance General Manager Linda Richardson says the Choices discharge program works with people in crisis to address their underlying mental health and social issues and avoid unnecessary pathways into hospital or police custody.

"Choices provides compassionate, integrated support to vulnerable people and empowers them to make good choices for a better future," said Ms Richardson.

RUAH CEO Debra Zanella says one of the unique aspects of Choices is its use of the Peer Support Model.

"Peer workers promote the possibility of recovery and understand that every journey is unique and individual. For the people accessing the Choices program, having someone they can relate to provides them with comfort and confidence," Ms Zanella said.

Choices clients are also connected to a case worker who provides individualised, ongoing support and linkages to community and health services to address underlying issues contributing to re-presentation and overall poor health.

Dr Amanda Stafford ED consultant at RPH, says people who present often to hospital emergency departments can have a raft of other issues, and these can worsen in the absence of supportive intervention.

“Choices is the first project of its kind. It is trying to help the large group of people in our community seen frequently in hospital emergency departments or by the justice system – people with lives of constant chaos that leaves them one step away from homelessness or other social disasters,” Ms Stafford said.

RUAH commenced delivery of pilot services at Royal Perth Hospital in November 2017 and Rockingham Hospital in April 2017. A short pilot has also been completed at the Perth Watch House, with services now being trialled at the Perth Magistrates Court.

This service has been made possible through funding provided by the Australian Government under the PHN Program.

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About WAPHA: WAPHA oversees the strategic commissioning functions of the Perth North, Perth South and Country WA Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The WA PHNs are three of 31 PHNs established by the Australian Government nationally to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. We work across the WA healthcare system with doctors, allied health professionals, Area Health Services and service providers to improve the coordination of care for people who are at risk of poor health outcomes. For more information, visit www.wapha.org.au