

Initial Assessment and Referral Service

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) is establishing a state-wide initial assessment and referral (IAR) service for GPs and other referrers.

The aim of the IAR service is to provide an effective system for the initial assessment and referral of individuals presenting with mental health conditions in primary health care settings¹.

As 75 per cent of referrals for Primary Health Networks' commissioned mental health services are made by GPs², it is crucial that GPs have ready access to information and processes that will enable them to tailor interventions to meet the needs of the person.

What is the IAR Service?

Staffed by experienced and suitably qualified clinicians, the IAR service will offer a single, whole-of-state virtual clinic for GP referrals. It will provide a standardised comprehensive initial assessment, as patients begin care.

The IAR aims to provide a GP (or other referrer) with an experience akin to submitting and receiving clinical test results from a specialist.

By assisting GPs and their patients make informed treatment choices, the IAR service aims to improve the consistency and quality of patient intake, assessment and referral, thereby leading to better treatment outcomes for individuals.

The IAR service will ensure individuals are guided to the option that best meets their clinical needs and recovery goals and has the least burden on the individual and the health system.

Through the IAR, WAPHA aims to:

- Provide timely access for individuals to a more personalised and comprehensive assessment, that will ensure identified treatment and treatment support options are proportionate to need.

- Improve assignment of the right level of care for individuals leading to better clinical outcomes and engagement with treatment.
- Provide access for GPs to a single service that will provide a standardised measurement-based assessment, treatment and treatment support referral and recommendations.
- Enhance standardisation of referrals by GPs to service providers, supported by GP collaboration with their patients.
- Improve sector wide effectiveness and efficiency of referrals and individual choice.

Who is it for?

The IAR service is targeted at individuals who are at risk of, or with mild to moderate mental illness, and, in some circumstances, severe mental illness who can be most appropriately managed in

primary care and from an underserved population; and/or unable to equitably access Medicare Benefits Scheme treatments due to disadvantage.

Further information regarding WAPHA's target groups can be found at [Fact Sheet 8: Target Groups](#)

Service Principles

The IAR is based on the following principles³:

1. **Supported decision making:** Within supported decision-making frameworks, there is an inherent respect and appreciation for the perspectives of consumers, carers and clinicians alike. Consumers and carers are provided with clear clinical information and encouragement to support their active engagement in the decision making process.

1 Australian Government Department of Health. *National PHN Guidance Initial Assessment and Referral for Mental Healthcare Version 1.02, Canberra, 2019.*

2 Australian Government Department of Health (2019)

3 Australian Government Department of Health (2019)

2. Preference for the **least intensive and least intrusive evidence-based intervention** that is most likely to lead to the most significant possible gain.
3. **Accessible services:** An individual is more likely to engage in an intervention that is simple to access, flexible and affordable.
4. **Responsive and flexible services:** As people's clinical needs change over time, services respond by increasing or decreasing service intensity, or varying the type or number of services provided. It is intended that this should happen seamlessly and without requiring re-referral and re-entry to the system.
5. **Effective clinical governance:** Underpinned by the National Safety and Quality Health Services Standards and the National Standards for Mental Health Services, WAPHA will ensure effective mechanisms are in place for monitoring and managing the quality of care in a way that meets or exceeds the national standards.
6. **Safe services:** In accordance with the National Standards for Mental Health Services, WAPHA will ensure effective mechanisms are in place to support the safety of consumers, carers, families, communities and staff.



Figure 1: The Initial Assessment and Referral service referral pathway



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This is one of a series of factsheets regarding mental health and primary health care, developed by WAPHA. Further factsheets and other resources can be found at www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-framework. The information in this factsheet was accurate at December 2020.