

Measuring Impact: Exploring the fine line between sense-making and data collection burden

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Biography:

Carla has worked as an evaluator and data analyst for mental health services for over 7 years. She holds an undergraduate degree in Psychological Science and a Master of Public Health. She currently manages a team of analysts at the Brisbane North Primary Health Network (PHN)

Demonstrating the impact of mental health services is a unanimous goal shared by researchers, politicians, clinicians and patients. Unfortunately, despite considerable attempts at national, regional, and program-level impact evaluations, it is still invariably difficult to draw to meaningful, and even less likely, definitive, conclusions. This presentation aims to unpick the complexity of evaluation and data collection in mental health services. By presenting a series of case studies including the Better Access scheme, national evaluations of mental health programs, and local evaluations of PHN-commissioned services, key principles of data collection and data analysis will be observed.

As researchers, data collection is seen as a cornerstone to evidence, yet as clinicians and service users, this can seem burdensome, fruitless and a waste of valuable time. We will explore programs where data collection is overly complex and intensive and discuss the implications for evaluation and service delivery. Similarly, we will consider national initiatives where data collection is sparse, and the resultant inability to provide commentary on the effectiveness of the intervention.

Positioning our data capture as simple and meaningful is the goal. To do so, basic principles of evaluation for impact measurement in mental health will be presented in a succinct and jargon-free manner. The importance of understanding cause and effect within interventions, and the manner in which qualitative reflections build a narrative of the client journey are both fundamental concepts to this presentation. We aim to navigate the complexity of story-telling about intervention success, bring evaluation back to its roots, and to find the sweet spot in data collection. In this way, our clients have enough time to tell their stories, and our programs can reliably and readily tell their own.

Learning Objectives

Measuring impact of mental health services.

References

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