

Stepped System of Care for Eating Disorders

Principles; Guidelines; Lived experience; Research and evaluation

Involvement of person and family/supports/community

Prevention

Actions, programs, or policies that aim to reduce modifiable risk factors for eating disorders, and/or bolster protective factors, to reduce the likelihood that a person will experience an eating disorder. Eating disorder prevention actions, programs or policies may also seek to address the broader factors which impact on health, known as the social determinants of health.

Contexts: Whole of community response including: government; public health; schools and education settings; health and community services including primary care; sports, cultural, youth and other settings; lived experience organisations; media and social media; individuals, families, and communities.

Identification

Identification of warning signs or symptoms in a family, community, or clinical context, and engagement with the person who may be experiencing an eating disorder, to support access to an initial response. In some instances, warning signs or symptoms may be self-identified, and the person may seek out an initial response themselves.

Contexts: Individuals and families; community services; schools and education settings; sports, cultural, youth and other settings; lived experience organisations; helplines and digital tools; public and private health and mental health services including general practice, community health services, child and adolescent/youth and adult community mental health services, headspace, Head to Health, emergency departments, eating disorder-specific services.

Initial Response

Completion of an initial assessment and preliminary diagnosis, and referral to the most appropriate treatment options based on the person's psychological, physical, nutritional, and psychosocial needs. This may include facilitating access to an appropriate intervention for a person experiencing sub-threshold eating/ body image concerns. An initial response should also provide psychoeducation, support the person to engage with treatment, and encourage the involvement of the person's family/ supports and community.

Contexts: Public and private health and mental health services including general practice, child and adolescent/youth and adult community mental health services, headspace, Head to Health, emergency departments, eating disorder-specific services.

Treatment

Community-based Treatment

Evidence-based mental health treatment delivered in the community, ranging from self-help and brief interventions to longer courses of treatment, in conjunction with medical monitoring and treatment, nutritional intervention, and coordinated access to a range of services and transition support as needed.

Contexts: Digital interventions; public and private health and mental health services including general practice, child and adolescent/youth and adult community mental health services, headspace, Head to Health, eating disorder-specific services.

Community-based Intensive Treatment

Evidence-based mental health treatment delivered in the community, at a higher level of frequency or intensity than community-based treatment, in conjunction with medical monitoring and treatment, nutritional intervention, and coordinated access to a range of services and transition support as needed. Community-based intensive treatment can be delivered in a number of forms, including day programs, intensive outpatient programs, and community or home outreach interventions.

Contexts: Public and private eating disorder-specific services; child and adolescent/youth and adult community mental health services.

Hospital and Residential Treatment

Admission to hospital for people who are at medical and/or psychiatric risk, or admission to a hospital or residential program for people who are medically stable but would benefit from a higher level of treatment and support than can be provided through community-based or community-based intensive treatment options. Hospital or residential treatment should also include coordinated access to a range of services and transition support as needed. Nutritional support and intervention are a key part of hospital and residential treatment.

Contexts: Medical and psychiatric inpatient units; eating disorder-specific inpatient units; emergency departments; hospital in the home; rehabilitation units; residential eating disorder services.

Psychosocial and Recovery Support

Services and programs which support the broader psychological and social needs of the person experiencing or at risk of an eating disorder and their family/ supports/ community (psychosocial support); and/or which support a person experiencing an eating disorder to engage with or sustain recovery or improved quality of life and assist family/ supports/ community in their role (recovery support). People experiencing eating disorders and their families/ supports/ communities may engage in a range of psychosocial and recovery support services across the system of care, at different stages of their journey.

Contexts: Community and social services; peer support services; lived experience organisations; headspace; Head to Health; helplines and digital resources.