

NEDC Guide to Collaboration

Collaboration

Collaboration means voluntarily and cooperatively working together to address problems and achieve common goals. Collaboration is the way forward when problems are complex and no one person or organisation is able to solve them working alone. It provides the best way to overcome isolation, to identify shared priorities, to share knowledge, to develop solutions and to simplify complex systems.

Every collaboration is unique, adopting the best practices to meet its specific goals. Collaborations can look quite different in various contexts. They may involve formal partnerships between organisations, project teams in the workplace, or virtual networks online. When collaboration is adopted by a whole sector it is like a community of practice, with individuals voluntarily joining the community in order to share knowledge, learn from each other and contribute to improvement for their sector.

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC)

Collaboration is the core operating principle of the NEDC.

- Enabling people to share knowledge through networking, working groups, professional development workshops, e-networks and e-bulletins
- Collaboratively developing evidence based standards, resources and reports to inform governments, health service providers and other key stakeholders
- Facilitating access to information through a website and clearinghouse, workshops, and e-communication
- Collaborating with other sectors and organisations to integrate eating disorders knowledge into all areas of mainstream health

Shared understanding is an essential foundation for effective collaboration, both within the eating disorders sector and between the eating disorders sector and other sectors.

Solving Complex Problems Together

Complex problems are those which are hard to understand and deal with because they have many interconnected parts and many different people and organisations are involved.

Eating Disorders are highly complex illnesses, with significant psychological and medical issues. Prevention, treatment and recovery support for eating disorders requires a multidisciplinary approach. The combination of psychological and medical needs presents challenges to the traditional organisation of the health system. To successfully resolve problems for the delivery of prevention, treatment and recovery support, all the different professional groups and organisations need to be engaged in collaborative problem solving.

The primary purpose of the NEDC is to bring together all these stakeholders to help develop a nationally consistent approach to the prevention and management of eating disorders. NEDC members and stakeholders represent every professional group, organisation and government that has a role to play in the prevention, early intervention, treatment or recovery support for Eating Disorders.

Bringing together three key interest groups – research, clinicians, consumers and carers – in collaborative problem solving helps the NEDC to draw on a wide knowledge base; promote shared understanding of the complex issues associated with eating disorders and identify and promote effective solutions to eating disorders.

Overcoming Isolation and Complex Systems

Eating disorder services in Australia have developed on an opportunistic basis largely in isolation from each other and other health sectors, driven by individual expertise, perceived local need and funding opportunity.

Prior to the formation of the NEDC, many frontline professionals worked in isolation from other people involved in the prevention or treatment of eating disorders. People with eating disorders, their families and supporters, navigated complex service systems and searched for information on eating disorders without clear points of entry or support. This lack of contact added to the problems of the already fragmented and patchy nature of eating disorder service delivery.

Collaboration through the NEDC can help to overcome isolation, help people to find information and services, build shared understanding, promote partnerships for research and service delivery, and contribute to finding solutions to the prevention and treatment of eating disorders.

Shared Goals and Mutual Benefits

The NEDC depends on its members. Collaboration cannot happen without the active participation of members.

Collaboration should be of mutual benefit to everyone who participates by helping people to work on important, shared, goals. Ultimately collaborative working should enable you to better meet the needs of people with eating disorders.

The NEDC can benefit individual members by:

- Providing access to information, advice and support
- Promoting mutual support through networking
- Enabling the exchange of ideas and expertise
- Offering different and broader perspectives on working practice
- Improving understanding and raising awareness of issues
- Enabling members to have a voice in the development of standards and service models

Bringing together people with different points of view and different interests does not automatically ensure collaboration. Collaboration is not difficult, but it does require a conscious effort to create a way of working that promotes cooperation between people with different points of view.

The research on collaboration clearly shows that it pays to be generous; the more people participate and contribute from their own knowledge the more benefits they gain from collaboration. It is important to collaborate rather than compete to be able to be an effective voice and implement a successful system.