



RCAA

Rehabilitation Counselling
Association of Australasia

22 February 2017

Statement to Headspace and Department of Health regarding the implementation of a three-year Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program at Headspace sites nationally.

RCAA is the professional association exclusively representing the interests of Australasian Rehabilitation Counsellors (RCs) with tertiary qualifications in rehabilitation counselling. As a profession, rehabilitation counselling evolved from post-world war vocational rehabilitation for returned services personnel. Since that time, the major focus and core skill-set of RCs has become the provision of vocational and occupational rehabilitation services for people experiencing illness, injury, and disability, including mental illness, such that these conditions affect people's capacity to obtain and maintain gainful employment.

Rehabilitation counselling practice includes interventions to assess and improve psychosocial, physical, emotional, and vocational functioning of individuals who experience vocational disadvantage. Rehabilitation Counsellors have provided professional services within personal injury management and vocational rehabilitation systems for many decades. Indeed, vocational assessment, needs assessment, planning and career counselling; job development and placement; case management and, workplace disability management, are among the core competencies and expertise of Rehabilitation Counsellors (Matthews, et al., 2010; Matthews et al., 2015). Rehabilitation Counsellors are specifically trained at the tertiary level to professionally serve people with disabilities through assessment, case management, vocational and avocational rehabilitation.

RCAA welcomes the decision by the Department of Health and Headspace to locate "Vocational Specialists" in Headspace sites, thereby recognising and including vocational rehabilitation services as an integral part of any services provided to people with mental health conditions.

As the only Allied Health profession in Australia with core academic training in the vocational evaluation process, particularly as it pertains to persons with disabilities, and on behalf of our members, tertiary qualified Rehabilitation Counsellors, RCAA welcomes the opportunity to make the following recommendations:

Due to the complex nature of youth mental health conditions, RCAA recommends that Headspace and its lead agencies predominantly advertise and recruit Rehabilitation Counsellors for the positions of "Vocational Specialist".

RCAA would like to reiterate that RCs are the only discipline in Australia who undertake core academic training in the vocational evaluation process, particularly pertaining to people with disabilities. RC training includes vocational assessment and vocational counselling, the administering of suitable vocational assessment tests for people with

disabilities, identification of appropriate training opportunities and required supports/adjustments, job analysis, workplace modifications, job creation, job placement and support, labour market analysis, job search skills development and supported job search. As part of the vocational evaluation process, RCs also learn at the tertiary level how to assist adolescents with disabilities to transition into the world of work.

Employer engagement and appropriate assessment of person-environment congruence, along with the application of other evidence-based practice to ensure appropriate matching of an employee with a workplace and employer, all need to be applied to the process of job development and placement for individuals with disability. RCs are expertly placed to apply this knowledge in practice, to ensure enhanced outcomes in job durability and career development for people with disability. In fact, RCs are the only tertiary qualified allied health professionals expertly trained in vocational assessment and job placement.

Rehabilitation Counsellors are acknowledged as the experts in vocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities across various workers' compensation and motor accident insurance schemes, and the Department of Human Services in providing disability employment specialist interventions.

Rehabilitation Counsellors are recognised within the NSW Lifetime Care and Support Scheme as the preferred Allied Health Professional to provide vocational rehabilitation services. The expertise of Rehabilitation Counsellors is recognised by NSW Health, who employ Rehabilitation Counsellors within the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit to provide vocational rehabilitation services, and in spinal injuries units, where Rehabilitation Counsellors provide vocational rehabilitation services to people with spinal cord injuries within three hospital inpatient settings. In Queensland, a Rehabilitation Counsellor has been appointed to provide these services within the spinal injuries unit at Princess Alexandra Hospital, as part of the Motor Accident Insurance Commission (QLD) funded 'Back2Work' vocational rehabilitation program.

As discussed, within Australian University settings, Rehabilitation Counsellors are the only Allied Health Profession who complete core tertiary training in the vocational evaluation process. Rehabilitation Counsellors have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of job placement models for people with disabilities. Again, Rehabilitation Counsellors are the only professionals trained in job placement models, such as the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. RCs are the only profession with guaranteed academic training in creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, the skills to complete worksite assessments, identify and negotiate modifications and or adjustments required and foundation training to provide specialised supported employment. Further, RCs are expertly trained to engage with employers to assist people with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.

RCAA would also like to recommend that Vocational Rehabilitation services provided by Headspace and its Lead Agencies be expanded to encompass a "Career Development" approach.

The Career Development model for vocational rehabilitation involves four phases: (a) career exploration and decision making, (b) career enhancement, (c) job realisation, and (d) career management (Buys, et al., 2003). This model focuses on the longer-term employability of people with disabilities (Buys, et al., 2003).

The expansion of Headspace vocational rehabilitation services to include the application of the career development model by appropriately qualified staff, such as Rehabilitation Counsellors, would result in increased client independence, a reduction in ongoing assistance and increases the likelihood of long term, sustainable employment outcomes (Buys, et al., 2003).

RCAA would like to suggest that if Headspace implements a career development model, that any such services be facilitated by RCs as the services directly align with our academic training and core competencies.

A Career Development Model would involve the following:

Career exploration and decision making phase: (a) clarification of career and life aspirations and values, (b) develop self-knowledge of their skills, abilities, aptitude and interests, (c) understand the barriers to their participation in work and a career, (d) obtain knowledge of occupations and the labour market, and (e) make career choices based on this information;

Career enhancement phase: (a) understand and develop their skill levels in relation to job hunting and pursuing their chosen career, and (b) enhancing their knowledge of the world of work in relation to their specific job and chosen career;

Job realisation phase including the provision of services such as worksite modification, assistive technology, job coaching, implementation of support services and other workplace interventions;

Career management phase involves assisting clients to maintain and advance their careers, including the process of changing jobs in the future and reviewing career over time (Buys, et al., 2003).

Further, RCAA recommends that resources and support be provided to suitable young people with disability to become qualified professionals through engagement in tertiary study. Often the lived experience of disability and/or disadvantage is very relevant and valuable in a diverse range of professions. Such a pilot program could be aimed at providing opportunities for participants to build their career opportunities, earn decent salaries and enjoy increased health status and quality of life. RCs are well placed to encourage participants to consider and thoroughly evaluate occupations that require tertiary study.

Should you have any queries regarding the core competencies and skills of Rehabilitation Counsellors, or would like to discuss this matter with representatives of the Board of Directors, we invite you to email us on admin@rcaa.org.au

Submission prepared by Danielle McGlone-Perrin and Dr Vanette McLennan, on behalf of the Rehabilitation Counselling Association of Australasia (RCAA).

References

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