



SDECC Annual Impact Report

2024 - 2025

‘sdecc’

Sydney Drug Education & Counselling Centre

Acknowledgment of country.

SDECC acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Owners.

We value their cultures, identities, and their continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

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Message from the Chairperson

Will Adams

This year has been a period of transition for SDECC, and I am pleased to say that throughout it our focus has remained where it matters most – on the young people and families we support. The compassion and professionalism shown by our team continues to have a significant impact, and we continue to receive strong feedback from clients and families.

We would like to acknowledge our former CEO, Kathryn Key, for her leadership and commitment since stepping into the role in 2021. Kathryn made significant and important progress in articulating our model of care, working with our funders on strengthening performance frameworks, and enhancing our employee proposition through wellbeing and updated remuneration. We thank Kathryn sincerely and wish her every success in her next chapter.

In early 2025, we welcomed Dominique Robert-Hendren as our new CEO. Dominique brings a strong blend of clinical excellence and organisational leadership, and has already provided thoughtful and steady guidance during this period of change. We look forward to working closely together as we continue to strengthen our services and deepen our impact across Northern Sydney.

I would also like to acknowledge **Ian Farmer**, who handed over the role of Chair to me in February 2025 after approximately six years of dedicated leadership. Ian's commitment and steady guidance have been invaluable, and the Board and I thank him sincerely for his outstanding contribution to SDECC.

We remain grateful to our funding partners, in particular the Primary Health Network, for their continued support and openness to collaboration.

At the Board level, we welcomed Sharyn Schultz and Martin Anderson this year, whose experience and insight will be valuable as we move forward. We also acknowledge and thank Sarah Mercer and Merrianne Sinclair for their many years of service. A special note of appreciation goes to Merrianne for over two decades of dedicated involvement with SDECC.

Finally, and most importantly, on behalf of the Board, I extend our sincere gratitude to every member of the SDECC team. The work you do is unique, challenging, and deeply meaningful. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to supporting young people and families with care, respect and hope.



Message from the CEO

Dominique Robert-Hendren

Throughout the past year, SDECC has responded to increasing challenges affecting young people, their families, and caregivers in our community with deep compassion and understanding. In these difficult times, the significance of our services has never been clearer, as we witness firsthand the struggles caused by alcohol and other drugs, mental ill-health, loneliness and health inequities. These circumstances can sometimes lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as risky substance use behaviours, but our devoted commitment is grounded in empathy and genuine care for every person who turns to us for help. We have dedicated ourselves to empowering individuals with compassionate support and practical strategies, fostering healthier habits and resilience. Together, guided by a shared sense of purpose, we are creating a future where all young people are given the chance to flourish, regardless of the obstacles they face.

This year saw the launch of our new strategy, developed with a deep commitment to ensure SDECC delivers care that's both responsive and inclusive, guided by a 'no wrong door' philosophy. Our 'whole of person' model of care is firmly embedded in best practice principles and builds upon our long-standing commitment to trauma-informed care, grounded in scientific evidence and shaped by the lived experiences of those we serve. Recognising the interconnectedness of alcohol, other drugs, and mental health, we remain unwavering in our dedication to non-judgemental, person-centred support

that honours the dignity and unique needs of every individual who seeks help.

Through new collaborative partnerships, we are addressing critical gaps in integrated care and forging stronger relationships to maximise our impact. Our work is guided by the voices of our community, whether it's through one-to-one counselling, online parent initiatives, or school-based programs, we ensure that compassion is at the heart of everything we do. By harnessing the community's insights and co-designing services together, we deliver meaningful change that respects, empowers and honours those we serve.

SDECC's strategic plan marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter, establishing us as leaders in youth alcohol and drug support. During a period of significant organisational change, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to every member of the SDECC team for your unwavering dedication and purpose-driven care. Your tireless efforts provide hope and support to some of the most vulnerable young people in our community, offering them understanding and a path towards brighter futures. Thank you for all that you do.

As we reflect on our progress and celebrate what we have accomplished together, we remain focused on a meaningful future united by purpose. We will continue to embrace growth, drive positive change and expand SDECC's impact even further, as we shape tomorrow together.

Our People: Board Directors

We extend our sincere appreciation to both current and former Board Directors for their valuable contributions to advancing SDECC's vision.



**Will Adames, BSC Hons, DipGovt. Mgmt.
(Chair)**

Will is a communications professional with a wide range of experience gained in private and public sector roles. He currently works in local government specialising in community and business engagement. Will has a degree in Environmental Engineering and diplomas in Management and Government.



**Ian Farmer, FICA, ICA
(Company Secretary, Former Chair)**

Ian had a 30-year career in professional services where he advised a range of multinational clients and worked in senior roles in Australia and overseas, before joining a number of Not For Profit boards almost 10 years ago. Ian served as SDECC Board Chair for over 6 years, stepping down in February 2025 and is company secretary at the time of this report. Ian is also currently a director and the company secretary of CRC Ltd which supports individuals, families and communities impacted by the criminal legal system.



**Anthony Kutra, BECON (Hons), BA
(Treasurer)**

Tony is an experienced non-executive director with over 15 years of board experience covering public, private and non-profit organisations, with the latter being focused upon child and family services. His expertise includes strategic planning, corporate development, mergers and acquisitions, operations and corporate governance. Tony is SDECC Treasurer and Chair of the Finance and Risk Committee.



Tushna Moddie, B. International Business

Tushna is a senior Human Resources Leader with over 16 years' experience in people strategy, change management, culture, leadership development, organisational development and strategic HR business partnering working. Tushna's experience has been in a range of industries including medical devices, FMCG, Financial Services and Healthcare. Tushna is a member of the Finance and Risk Sub-Committee.



Paul Hogan, BA Comm.

Paul works in the Executive and Ministerial Support branch, NSW Ministry of Health. He has a local government background, having worked for a number of councils in social planning and youth services roles. He has also worked extensively in the non-government sector.



Nick Dillenbeck, B. Comm. (Liberal Studies)

Nick is a management consultant, helping ASX-listed, private and government organisations develop strategies and deliver performance improvement projects.

Board Directors



Sharyn Schultz, BEd, HR Dev

- (Appointed on 25/03/2025)

Sharyn is a specialist in people and culture, with strong expertise in organisational culture, aligning people strategies with business objectives, and leading change. Her capability can be summed up in one word: breadth—spanning diverse industries, organisations, and knowledge, supported by more than 20 years of senior executive experience. Sharyn also contributes her skills beyond the workplace, serving on several NGO boards and volunteering with local community clubs.



Dr Martin Anderson, BSc Phys, MSc Epi, PhD Clin Neurophys, MBA

- (Appointed on 27/05/2025)

Martin is an experienced leader with over 20 years in senior roles. He's known for his ability to solve complex problems, drive positive change, and use innovation and smart solutions to build strong, effective teams. His career includes significant leadership roles at major financial institutions like Westpac and Commonwealth Bank, as well as technology companies like Huawei, where he drove successful change and improved operations efficiency. With his strong leadership in transforming technology and a deep understanding of complex environments, Martin brings invaluable expertise that will support our strategic direction and amplify our impact. We are delighted to have him on board and look forward to the insights and energy he will contribute.

**Sarah Mercer, BSc(Psychol),HONS, MClinPsych, MAPS**

- (Resigned on 19/02/2025)

Sarah is a Clinical Psychologist who has worked for Government and non-Government organisations and in Private Practice. Sarah's has worked as a Psychologist in the Northern Beach area. Her focus has been on working with children, young people and their families.

**Merrianne Sinclair, BSW, Grad Dip VET, Cert IV TAE10**

- (Resigned on 19/02/2025)

Merrianne is a social worker who has worked for both Government and non-Government organisations and, has also had a private counselling practice. Merrianne currently works as a teacher and workplace trainer and assessor for TAFE NSW at Northern Beaches Campus. Merrianne was the Secretary and Chair of The Governance Sub-Committee.

Our Operations & Clinical Teams



Dominique Robert-Hendren

CEO, Clinical Psychologist



Nicole Robinson

Clinical Services Manager, Counsellor



Vivienne Li

Group Program Manager, Social Worker



Katherine Dixon

People, Culture & Community
Engagement Manager



Graziela Bueno

Office Manager



Rez Akbarian

Research & Evaluation
Coordinator, Counsellor



Merqtoosha Camilleri-Medina

Marketing Lead



Fabiola Platinetti

AOD Counsellor



Nick Fischer

AOD Counsellor



Nicolle Keith

AOD Counsellor



Elischa Vella

AOD Counsellor



Costanza Ravanelli

AOD Counsellor, Psychologist



Simon Hook

AOD Counsellor



Joanne Sabena

Governance Lead

SDECC's Model of Care

SDECC's Model of Care builds upon our vision and mission by offering a holistic, person-centred approach that prioritises early intervention, tailored support and ongoing engagement with young people and their families.

Our framework integrates best practice principles, drawing on the latest evidence and lived experience of those we serve to create flexible pathways that address individual needs.

By fostering collaboration across health, education and community sectors, we ensure that each young person receives coordinated, wrap-around care supporting them to overcome challenges, develop resilience and achieve their full potential in an environment free from judgement and stigma.

Client Journey

The client journey encompasses a series of stages designed to provide comprehensive and tailored support to young people. This journey is structured to ensure that each individual receives the care and guidance necessary for their unique circumstances.

Intake: The initial stage where young people are welcomed into the service, information is gathered and eligibility is determined to ensure the most appropriate support is offered.

Assessment: A thorough evaluation of the young person's needs, strengths and goals, enabling the development of a personalised care plan is conducted.

Intervention: The delivery of evidence-informed interventions, targeting the reduction of harm related to alcohol and other drug use while supporting the young person's wellbeing and resilience are implemented.

Monitor & Review: Ongoing monitoring and review of progress take place, with adjustments made to care plans as needed to respond to changing needs and circumstances.

Discharge: The planned and supported conclusion of formal involvement takes place, ensuring a smooth transition and continued access to resources or support networks as required.

Our Approach

Our approach is grounded in principles that ensure respectful, holistic, and effective care for every young person.

Harm Reduction and Trauma-Informed Care:

Prioritising safety, minimising harm, and recognising the impact of trauma on individuals' lives and choices.



Young-Person Centred:

Placing the needs, preferences, and voices of young people at the heart of all decision-making and support provision.

Biopsychosocial-Cultural Model:

Addressing the biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors that influence health and wellbeing.

Lived and Living Experience:

Valuing and integrating insights from those with direct experience of alcohol and other drug use.

Culturally Diverse:

Respecting and responding to the unique cultural identities and backgrounds of each young person.

Privacy & Confidentiality:

Upholding strict standards to protect the personal information and dignity of all clients.

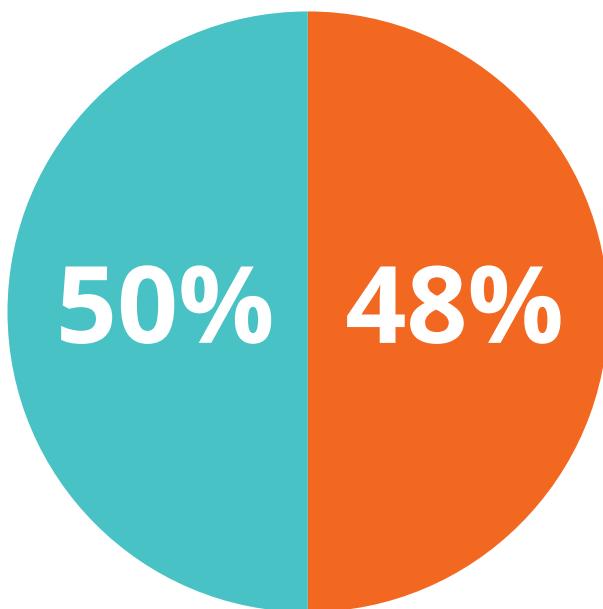
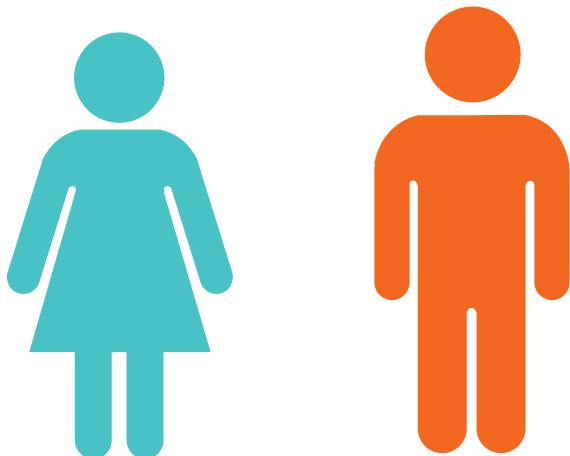
Family and Caregiver Involvement:

Engaging families and caregivers as partners in the care process, where appropriate and with consent.

Multiple Referral Pathways and Integrated Care:

Ensuring accessible entry points into the service and other services catering to a variety of needs and circumstances.

Our Clients



2%
Other



12%
CALD*



19%
LGBTQIA+



4%
Aboriginal &
Torres Strait
Islander People

*Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

Co-occurring Issues

87% reported experiencing moderate to high psychological distress



Mood Disorders



Anxiety



ADHD



PTSD



Psychotic Disorders

Occupational & Social Issues

20-25%



Disengaged with school/work

15%



Engaged with Youth Justice

<5%



Homeless

<5%



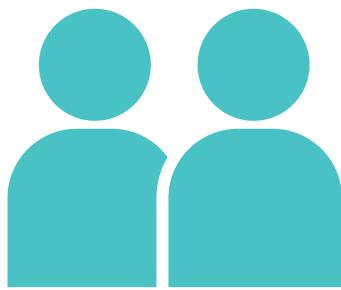
Hospitalised due to OD in past 12 months

<5%



On Safety Contract

Reach & Service Delivered in 2024 - 2025



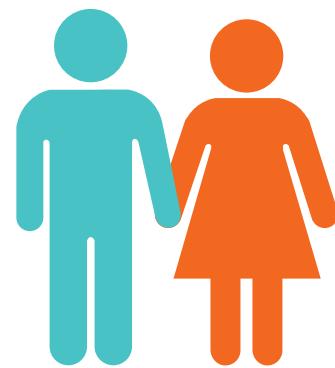
Total service enquiries
2966



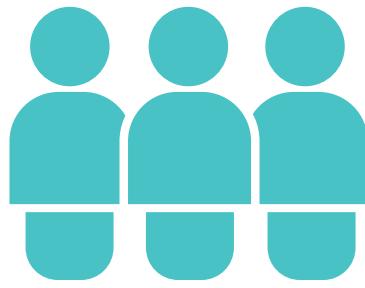
Total services provided
3263



Individual
counselling sessions
1916



Parents' Paving Ways
total group participants
757



Elevate
Group Program

304



Psychological
Assessments

295



Interdisciplinary
Team Meetings

212



Psychiatrist
Assessment

32



Telehealth
Consultations

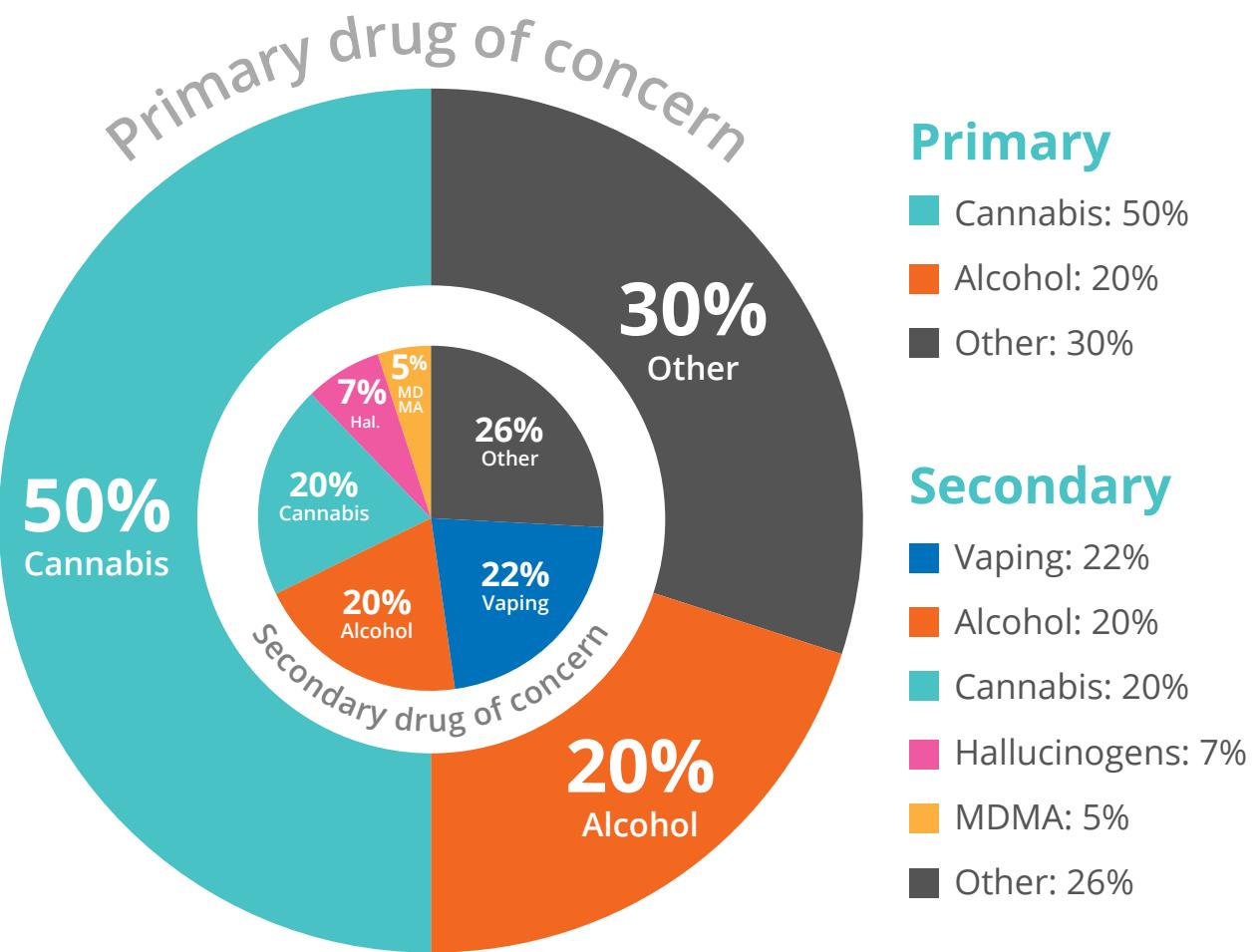
454



Text Messaging

814

Drug of Concern



Our Programs



Support for Young People | 1:1

Young people can access counselling with our experienced team, either in person at our Northern Beaches and North Shore offices, or via Telehealth across Sydney.



Support for Parents | Paving Ways

A 6-week group program for parents and carers affected by their young person's alcohol or drug use. It's a supportive space to explore strategies, reduce stress and feel less alone.



Support for Schools | Elevate

A 3-week group program delivered in High schools, Elevate creates a safe, engaging space to talk about substance use, learn about harm reduction and access support.

Length of Treatment

Average amount of sessions per episode of care equals

10

Length of time with service equals

21 weeks

Our Impact

Youth AOD & Mental Health Outcomes



81% REDUCED SUBSTANCE USE

After treatment, 81% of young people reduced or stopped using drugs/alcohol, as measured by the SDS.

IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH

61%



61% of young people reported a significant drop in psychological distress.**



65% BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

A marked improvement in wellbeing and daily functioning was reported by 65% of young people after completion treatment.***

*As measured by the SDS.

**As measured by the K10.

***As measured by the WHOQOL8

Client Experience:

An overview of client feedback and satisfaction, emphasizing the impact and significance of SDECC's services.

“Highly recommended course for teenage issues. The counsellors were very insightful, and the information was presented in clear and helpful way, each week rolling on from the next. Using the information from the content and the counsellors, the relationship with my son has improved and I am confident that this will continue.”

“This service is consistently steady in the support it offers our students. Thank you for all you offer.”

“It was a very helpful and enjoyable group and I learnt a lot.”

“SDECC has been of great assistance to me, I really appreciate all the help I've received and would recommend it highly.”

“Helped in many more ways than I was expecting, flexible, kind people.”

“Have come back to your service for help because you guys offer amazing support.”



Case Study:

Healing and Hope through SDECC's Trauma- Informed, Compassionate AOD Counselling

Supporting a Young Person in Overcoming Complex Challenges

Angie* an 18-year-old young person was referred to SDECC for drug and alcohol counselling by the Drug & Alcohol Registrar at RNS Hospital after experiencing a drug overdose and a suicide attempt. Seeking support for her use of MDMA, cannabis, and alcohol, she arrived with a complex background including lived experiences of anorexia nervosa, ADHD, anxiety, depression, trauma, and enduring suicidal thoughts dating back to early adolescence.

Taking a trauma-informed and harm reduction approach, SDECC recognised these intersecting challenges, prioritising her safety, dignity, and emotional wellbeing throughout her treatment journey. Over the course of 16 sessions, the focus was on Motivational Interviewing to address her ambivalence towards substance use and readiness for change. The sessions incorporated a strength-based approach, helping her identify her personal values and build motivation for healthier behaviours. Distress tolerance and emotion regulation skills were also introduced to support her in managing emotions that previously led to substance use as a coping mechanism.

Several months later, Angie has made notable strides, reporting a reduction in overall substance use since starting with SDECC. While she had previously used MDMA daily and experienced an overdose, she has only used MDMA once since commencing therapy. Although marijuana

use continues, she has established specific reduction goals with her clinician. Her SDS scores have improved, dropping from 12 at intake to 8 in subsequent treatment phases, demonstrating decreased substance dependence severity.

Throughout her treatment, the clinician worked closely with Angie's private GP, psychiatrist, and eating disorder psychologist to provide coordinated, consistent care. Her parents have also been involved in safety planning, ensuring she has a supportive network around her.

Angie is now more hopeful about her future, has re-enrolled at TAFE, and begun part-time work, demonstrating notable progress in her functional capacity and psychosocial wellbeing. Both she and her mother expressed gratitude for SDECC's support during her recovery journey.

By the conclusion of her sessions, Angie expressed renewed hope for her future. She had successfully returned to TAFE and commenced part-time employment, demonstrating notable progress in her functional capacity and psychosocial wellbeing. Both Angie and her mother conveyed heartfelt gratitude for the comprehensive, compassionate support received from SDECC throughout her recovery journey.



Collaboration & Community Engagement

SDECC Events: Fostering community awareness and involvement.

SDECC has undertaken targeted activities to strengthen referral pathways, increase visibility, and support continuity of care during 2024 – 2025.

- We participated and presented in Youth Week activities such as at Meadowbank TAFE; Blurred Minds; beaches youth hub; Colour Fest – Ryde Pride Launch.
- We visited and met with four new schools, including Student Support Officers and wellbeing teams to speak to them about our free programs.
- We engaged with GP clinics and school leaders and held a stall at Macquarie University for CYMHS for Northern Sydney, providing resources and merchandise to build connection and educate the community about SDECC services.
- We participated in numerous interagency or sector network meetings, including Kuringai Youth Interagency and meetings with Headspace Brookvale, Headspace Chatswood, YESS Chatswood, and Uniting Care.

- We delivered a Parents Prepared Workshop and an information session for a large public high school in Mandarin for parents.
- We introduced a new social media strategy with targeted posts tagging other health agencies and sharing pathways to access our services and programs.



Other activities, meetings and engagements included:

- PHN Community Cooperative
- CDAT Northern Beaches bi-monthly meetings
- LDAT Northern Beaches bi-monthly meetings
- SNHN Co-Design Workshop
- SNHN Provider Networking Meetings
- PHN Wellbeing Collaborative Workshops
- CEO & Leaders Forum MHCC Parliament House
- Sydney North Headspace Consortium
- AOD Family Research and Practice Network
- Regional Leadership Group Meetings
- SNHN AOD Network Meeting
- Clinical Care Standards Working Group
- Northern Beaches Suicide Prevention Working Group
- AOD QIT Committee Meeting
- NBYI - general meeting
- FPA Leadership meetings
- MHCC Special General Meeting & Member as required
- Beaches Youth Hub Steering Committee
- Northern Sydney District Sector Executive Group (SEG) bi-monthly



Research/Conferences

SDECC contributed to sector knowledge by sharing recent program outcomes and research findings at the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD) conference.

The SDECC team also actively participated in both the National Alcohol and Drug Advisory (NADA) event and the Drug Summit. During the NADA event, SDECC representatives engaged in panel discussions around best practice for service integration and improving client engagement, while the Drug Summit offered a platform to advocate for the unique needs of young people navigating substance use alongside complex mental health challenges.

Through these opportunities we highlighted innovative approaches in youth AOD counselling, emphasising trauma-informed practices and collaborative care models. These professional exchanges have strengthened SDECC's reputation as a leader in youth-focused, evidence-informed care, while forging valuable partnerships across the sector. Insights gained from these conferences continue to inform service delivery and inspire ongoing innovation within the organisation.



Our Strategy



Our Values

Supportive

Dedicated to the Mission

Engage, Empower, Encourage

Community-Led

Compassionate Care

Parent feedback

"I just wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for the life-changing support you've provided me and my two sons. Your compassion, expertise, and unwavering dedication have made a profound difference in our lives. From the very beginning, we were met with kindness and understanding -never judgment.

The counsellors have gone above and beyond to help us navigate our struggles, offering not just professional guidance but genuine care.

The tools and coping strategies we've learned have given us hope and a stronger foundation for the future. What stands out the most is how you've tailored your approach to each of us individually.

My sons and I all have different needs, and your team has respected and addressed those with patience and skill. Seeing my boys grow healthier and more confident because of your support is something I'll always be thankful for. This centre isn't just a facility, it's a place of healing, second chances, and real transformation. Thank you for helping us rebuild our lives, one step at a time.

We wouldn't be where we are today without you.

With sincere appreciation"



Our Partners

We gratefully acknowledge our partner organisations for their valuable support and collaboration in achieving SDECC's shared objectives. We extend our sincere appreciation to the Sydney North Primary Health Network, NSW Health, and the Ministry of Health for their continued partnership.

We would also like to recognise the Northern Beaches Council for their ongoing support, Lifeline Northern beaches and the Local Drug Action Team.

Sydney North PHN



NSW Health



Ministry of Health

Northern Beaches Council



‘sdecc’

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