

A Welcoming Program Structure

What can we do to help people seeking treatment feel welcome and engaged? Below is a collection of ideas from the health-care literature as well as the customer service industry.

Even simple changes can greatly improve people's satisfaction with their overall experience. Remember: It is not necessarily **what we do** that makes the impression, but **what we say** and how we communicate what we are doing.

Creating a welcoming program structure

At Alberta Health Services, we follow these three guiding principles to become more welcoming and engaging:

1. Every person who comes to us for support will have a consistent experience and will be welcomed and engaged regardless of where they enter the system.
2. Service and program environments are designed to welcome people with concurrent disorders and their families into treatment. This is reflected in policies, procedures, principles and philosophy as well as in program descriptions and orientation materials.
3. Staff members recognize their role in the care of people with addiction, mental health and concurrent disorders, and welcome and engage these people comfortably and confidently.

To be successful at improving patient experiences and outcomes, we need to address the issue of welcoming at an individual, system and organizational level.

What are our mission, vision, and values?

Mission, vision, and values statements can be used to explain our services and the philosophy behind them. These statements should be available for everyone that you serve. Include them in orientation materials and display them in waiting rooms and communal areas.

Creating welcoming policies, procedures, and protocols

How programs and services are set up have a profound impact on the ways staff behave and operate on a daily basis.

Procedures and protocols create a consistent approach that encourages welcoming, engagement and retention in services. Consider the following recommendations:

- All people seeking treatment and their families are actively welcomed into service. (This may involve a review of any existing exclusionary criteria.)
- People are given the earliest available appointment after initial contact.
- Staff members will communicate with those seeking treatment before their first appointment, or after a missed appointment. This may include welcoming and motivating letters, texts or phone calls.
- Staff members will consistently follow up with people during and after treatment to ensure their needs have been met, and to look for ways to enhance care and service delivery.

Creating orientation materials

Orientation materials should be available to all patients and staff. These should include:

- Details about services offered.
- Contact numbers, including after-hours crisis and emergency contacts.
- Clear description of processes.
- Service locations, including maps and bus routes.
- Information about what to bring to appointments.
- Leaflets and posters on addiction, mental health and concurrent disorders to appeal to a broad audience.
- Handouts on anti-stigma measures and approaches.
- All written information should be clear, colourful, user-friendly, and sensitive to cultural issues and other issues such as literacy levels and low vision.

Suggested activity

Spend a few moments either alone or with a colleague thinking about some of the policies, procedures and protocols currently followed within your program:

- How do they enhance or reduce your ability to welcome and engage clients into service?
- What changes, if any, could you make as a team?
- Do you have a team mission statement or vision?
- Do you have orientation materials? Is this information easily available and clearly displayed?
- What take-home information sheets could you create to give to the people you serve?