

Alcohol and Other Drug Counselling Information for Clients

1. WHAT HAPPENS IN ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG COUNSELLING?

The decision to begin counselling can seem daunting if you aren't sure what to expect. The main aim of counselling is to help you find a greater quality of life – you set the goals and your counsellor helps you find ways to achieve them. Successful counselling can only happen when you are actively involved and work together with your counselor. The more effort you put in, the more likely counselling will be effective.

The main focus of drug and alcohol counselling is to assist you to achieve your goals in relation to alcohol and other drug use. This might include reducing your use, quitting, or using in a safer way. Although the focus of our service is on alcohol and other use, it is common to talk about other issues (such as mental health or relationship problems) during the sessions. You can let your counsellor know if you are not ready to discuss certain topics. Remember, your counsellor is there to help you.

2. HOW MUCH DOES ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG COUNSELLING COST?

Alcohol and other drug counselling is funded by the State and Federal Government and provided at no cost to you. You don't need a GP referral to access alcohol and other drug counselling in the public health system.

3. WHAT IS THE WAITLIST TO SEE AN ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG COUNSELLOR?

The waitlist to see an alcohol and other drug counsellor will vary between different services and at different times of the year. Usually, you will be able to see a counsellor within 1-4 weeks of having your first assessment appointment. When you ring to make your first appointment, the worker will be able to tell you what the approximate waitlist will be.

4. HOW LONG DOES COUNSELLING GO FOR?

There is no 'set number' of counselling sessions for each person. Some people may attend for only a few sessions, whilst others may require longer (for example, up to 10 – 15 sessions). Your counsellor will help you to review your progress during treatment (usually checking in with you every 4-5 sessions) to make sure you're getting the most out of your

sessions. Try to talk about your progress with your counsellor as you go along, and let them know if you would like to try a different approach. It may be useful to ask yourself at the beginning *“How will I know when I have gotten what I need from the counselling sessions?”* and talk about this with your counsellor. Remember that the aim of counselling is to help you get to a point where you no longer need it!

5. MAKING REFERRALS TO OTHER SERVICES

During the assessment or counselling sessions your counsellor may talk to you about making a referral to other support services, such as residential withdrawal (‘detox’), mental health, dental, physiotherapy, or child and family services, including Child FIRST and Child Protection. Your counsellor might also ask to speak with other professionals involved in your care, such as your GP or psychiatrist. To make sure that you get the best out of treatment, your counsellor may need to link you in with specialized services (such as mental health or case management) before you are able to start alcohol and other drug counselling.

6. IS COUNSELLING PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL?

Counsellors are required to maintain the highest level of confidentiality about information discussed during counselling sessions. This means that they will not share any information about you outside of the treatment team. However, there are times when a counsellor is required to share information about you with someone else – even if you don’t want them to. These situations include:

- (1) if the counsellor believes you are in danger of seriously hurting yourself or someone else
- (2) if the counsellor believes that any children in your care are at serious risk of being hurt
- (3) if the information is required by law (e.g. if the counsellor is subpoenaed for a court case relating to you)
- (4) if you tell the counsellor that you have committed a serious violent crime and the police are not aware of your involvement

If you have been referred to alcohol and other drug counselling by Corrections Victoria, Child Protection or Youth Justice, your counsellor may need to give limited information about your treatment to the person that referred you. If this is the case, your counsellor will discuss this with you before you start counselling.



Our counsellors work in a team and may discuss cases with other counsellors and colleagues in the team to make sure you are being provided with the best possible care. Where there are serious risk issues, the counsellor will consult other team members who will be involved in the decision-making process.

7. WHAT IF I NEED TO CANCEL AN APPOINTMENT?

Counselling appointments generally last for up to 50 minutes. If you are unable to attend an appointment, please tell your counsellor as soon as possible so that they can offer that time to another client and reschedule your appointment. If you are running late for an appointment your session time will be shorter. If you regularly miss appointments it's hard for therapy to be effective, and your counsellor may need to talk with you about this.

8. WHERE IS MY INFORMATION STORED?

Your counsellor will record short case notes about your sessions in an electronic health file which is stored in a secure computer program at the service. Your file is password protected and can only be accessed by relevant health professionals at the service.

In some situations you may want to ask your counsellor to provide a letter of support for you (for example, if you have a court case and need to provide proof that you have attended counselling sessions). Your counsellor can provide a short letter about your attendance and progress but will usually need at least two weeks' notice to do this. Your counsellor is usually not able to provide a full court report assessment.

*We hope that this brochure has answered some of your questions about alcohol and other drug counselling. If you have any other questions, please speak with your counsellor about these or phone the central intake number on **1800 778 278**.*