

Mental health triage scale Project update

A newsletter to update you on the development of a statewide mental health triage scale

February 2008



The Mental Health Branch plans to introduce a mental health triage scale and associated guidelines for all Victorian area mental health services (AMHS).

The statewide mental health triage scale is being developed and implemented (1) to promote a more consistent and clinically appropriate response to consumers, carers and referrers seeking access to mental health services and (2) to provide a basis for better data collection about service access, utilisation and demand. The triage scale classifies the outcome of the mental health triage process i.e. the initial needs assessment of people who contact or who are referred to area mental health services.

Progress to date

The Victorian Chief Psychiatrist has led the development of a draft mental health triage scale and guidelines in consultation with the Mental Health Triage Scale Advisory Committee, which comprises senior clinical experts from the mental health sector, consumer and carer representatives, and members of the Mental Health Branch.

The draft mental health triage scale maps triage assessments to seven categories (Codes A to G) reflecting different levels of need, risk and urgency, and the response required by mental health or other services. The most urgent clinical feature determines the code chosen.

The draft scale and guidelines, and further information about their development, can be found on the Mental Health Branch website, www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth

Pilot sites

Following an expression of interest process, a number of mental health services have volunteered to participate in a six-month pilot and evaluation of the draft triage scale. The 13 pilot sites are:

- **Adult services:** North West (Broadmeadows), Inner Urban East (St Vincent's), North East (Austin), Central East and Outer East (Eastern Health), Loddon Mallee (Bendigo), and Northern Mallee (Mildura).
- **Child and adolescent services:** North Western Metropolitan (Royal Children's), South East (Southern Health), Loddon Mallee (Bendigo), and Goulburn and Southern (Goulburn Valley).
- **Aged persons services:** Goulburn/North East Hume (joint pilot with Shepparton and Wangaratta), Loddon Mallee (Bendigo) and Central and Outer East (Eastern Health).



Training program and website

The Mental Health Branch has engaged LearnPRN to develop a training program in the use of the mental health triage scale and to provide training and support to the pilot sites.

This part of the project will also involve the development of a secure website and elearning program that can be accessed by AMHS staff not directly involved in the pilot (enrolments and password-based access will be made available to up to 250 staff).

Kaye Knight from LearnPRN will lead the development of the training program and website, in collaboration with mental health and education experts from Bendigo Health. This process will include:

1. Visits to the pilot sites to establish the context for the training and relevant training needs.
2. Curriculum development for the face-to-face training, based on the existing draft guidelines.
3. Development of content for the web-based self-directed learning component and website development.
4. Delivery of onsite training to pilot sites. Note that the training schedule will be negotiated with participating services to ensure best fit with their needs.

LearnPRN will support the pilot sites via ongoing monitoring of the online forum during the pilot testing and will also collect evaluative information relating to the training.

Evaluation of the scale

The Mental Health Branch has engaged the University of Melbourne's School of Nursing to evaluate the reliability and usability of the draft mental health triage scale. The evaluation will make recommendations about any changes needed and any processes or materials needed to support consistent use of the scale.

Dr Natisha Sands and Dr Marie Gerdtz are leading the evaluation, which will involve:

1. Validation of a set of written triage case scenarios. Many mental health services have already provided de-identified case scenarios for use in this process but it is likely that we will need more: additional case scenarios will be gratefully received by the Mental Health Branch until the end of February.
2. Pre test analysis (i.e. before exposure to the mental health triage scale and associated training) of triage decision-making at the pilot sites. The written triage scenarios will form a key part of the tools used in this part of the evaluation.
3. Post-test analysis: the analysis described above will be reapplied after the scale has been used in practice and the training received.
4. A prospective review by experienced mental health triage clinicians to investigate the clinical validity of triage decisions by staff using the scale.
5. A limited prospective 'audit' of the extent to which services are able to provide a response within the timelines outlined in the scale.

Calling expert triage clinicians! We need you!

Written triage case scenarios are critical to the evaluation of the mental health triage scale and will also be used in the training program. Based on a methodology developed for an evaluation of the Australian Government's National Education Framework for Emergency Triage, the triage scenarios we have received from mental health services will be analysed to establish their content validity and inter-rater reliability.

We need clinicians who are experienced in triage assessment and/or the clinical review of triage case files to read a set of brief triage case scenarios. These volunteers will be asked to assign a rating on the draft mental health triage scale and to grade each scenario according to clarity and relevance.

We need to start with a large set of scenarios because—based on previous work in validating triage scenarios—we expect a high rejection rate from the original pool of scenarios. However, each scenario is only a paragraph or two long, and so the time commitment should be no more than 3 hours.

This work will be undertaken in late February or early March 2008. Volunteers are needed urgently. If you are able to assist, please contact Sue Brennan (telephone 9096 0459 or email sue.brennan@dhs.vic.gov.au) or Natisha Sands at the University of Melbourne (telephone 8344 0776 or email nsands@unimelb.edu.au)



RAPID/CMI screening register

In anticipation of implementing the mental health triage scale in all AMHS, the seven codes in the draft scale and their code labels have been included as a new field in the revised version of the RAPID/CMI screening register, which the Mental Health Branch released in 2007.

The screening register also has many new features that support the mental health triage function. Tracey Burgess of the Mental Health Branch can provide further information. Telephone Tracey on 03 9096 6112 or email tracey.burgess@dhs.vic.gov.au

Project governance

The project, including the evaluation and training consultancies, will be overseen by a Mental Health Branch project management group comprising the acting Chief Psychiatrist and/or his delegate from the Clinical Policy and Standards Unit, the Manager Service System Development, and a project officer from the Service System Development Unit. The project management will provide regular email updates on the project to Mental Health Triage Scale Advisory committee members, the Director Mental Health, and to stakeholders in the mental health sector.

Project stages and timelines

The key project stages and approximate timelines are shown below. The pilot test at each site will commence immediately after the training has been delivered and the pre-test data has been collected. Note that delivery of the training and pre-testing will be staggered across the pilot sites so schedules will differ somewhat between services.

Following the pilot test and evaluation, it is expected that the Mental Health Triage Advisory Committee will meet to approve a version of the scale for statewide implementation late in 2008.

STAGE/TIME	JAN 08	FEB 08	MAR 08	APR 08	MAY 08	JUN 08	JUL 08	AUG 08	SEP 08	OCT 08	NOV 08	DEC 08
Training												
Site visits	█											
Curriculum development	█											
Website development			█									
Training delivery					█							
Online forum and training evaluation				█								
Evaluation												
Scenario validation		█										
Pre-test at pilot sites				█								
Post-test at pilot sites					█							
Prospective clinical review											█	
Prospective 'audit' of AMHS responses to triage codes											█	
Trial of scale at pilot AMHS					█							

Mental Health Branch triage contact

Deirdre Pinto, who has been responsible for the mental health triage scale project, is leaving the Mental Health Branch. A replacement project manager will be appointed as soon as possible. In the meantime, enquiries about the project can be directed to Sue Brennan, Manager Service System Development, on 03 9096 0459 or email sue.brennan@dhs.vic.gov.au