

NEMHSCA COLLABORATION FORUM – SUMMARY

On 20th May 2026, NEMHSCA hosted the Collaborative Practice Forum, bringing together over **50 participants from 14 member agencies** across Melbourne’s north-east to explore practical approaches to collaboration, integrated care, and improved outcomes for people experiencing co-occurring mental health and AOD challenges.



The forum showcased examples of collaborative practice from across the region, highlighting innovative partnerships, workforce development initiatives, and service models designed to strengthen continuity of care.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE SNAPSHOTS

The morning featured four presentations demonstrating collaboration in action:

- **Practice Without Walls: Building AOD Capability**

Presented by Corinn Strating and Alana Istanto from the Whittlesea Mental Health and Wellbeing Local, this presentation highlighted a workforce-wide approach to improving responses to people experiencing co-occurring AOD and mental health needs.

- **Strengthening Overdose Response**

Joby Philip from Northern Health shared a collaborative initiative between Northern Health and Uniting Vic. Tas focused on strengthening overdose response capability through cross-service training, workforce development and shared learning.

- **Consumers Can Ask: Co-Designed Resource**

Dr Kevan Myers from Nexus Dual Diagnosis Service, St Vincent’s Hospital, presented a lived experience-led redevelopment of a consumer resource designed to support engagement, self-advocacy and participation in care.

- **Continuing Care Service**

Emily Alexander from Austin Health showcased a collaborative model that supports timely access to mental health services and coordinated care pathways for consumers requiring ongoing support.



CONSUMER JOURNEY CASE DISCUSSION

Participants then explored a real-world consumer journey case study presented by Neeteesha Nilmadhub (Uniting Vic. Tas) and Kat Hanson (Darebin Mental Health and Wellbeing Local). The discussion highlighted the importance of coordinated responses across services, the challenges of navigating complex systems, and the value of strong inter-service relationships in supporting positive consumer outcomes.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WORKSHOP

The forum concluded with an interactive workshop facilitated by Sarah Jones from Uniting Vic. Tas. Drawing on the Uniting's Effective Partnerships Toolkit, participants reflected on their own experiences of collaboration and identified practical strategies for strengthening partnerships across the mental health, AOD and community services sectors.

SERVICE SHOWCASE AND NETWORKING

Following the formal program, attendees participated in a networking lunch and service showcase featuring **seven service display stalls** representing:

- healthAbility
- Holstep Health – Stepped Care and Gamblers Help
- Darebin and Whittlesea Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals
- Northern Health Mental Health Division
- Austin Health Mental Health Division
- Uniting Vic. Tas
- Your Community Health



The showcase provided an opportunity for services to share information about programs, referral pathways, eligibility criteria and partnership opportunities, while enabling participants to build new connections and strengthen existing relationships across the Alliance.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Twenty-four participants completed the post-forum evaluation. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with networking and relationship building emerging as the most valued aspects of the day.

Participants highlighted:

- Opportunities to connect with colleagues from other organisations

- Learning about collaborative projects and innovative practice across the region
- Hearing practical examples of integrated care and partnership approaches
- Information sharing and increased awareness of available services
- Building relationships that support future collaboration

When asked about actions they would take following the forum, participants identified:

- Using the Effective Partnerships Toolkit in their work
- Strengthening collaboration with other services
- Building and maintaining professional relationships
- Continuing open communication across organisations
- Applying learnings from the collaborative practice examples presented



Feedback on the event was highly positive, with participants describing the forum as:

- Well organised and informative
- A valuable opportunity for networking and connection
- An excellent mix of presentations, discussion and practical examples
- A worthwhile opportunity to learn about local services and collaborative initiatives



Suggestions for future forums

included providing additional opportunities for networking and discussion, incorporating more interactive workshop activities and continuing to showcase collaborative projects.

KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DAY

Several consistent themes emerged throughout the presentations, discussions and evaluation feedback:

- **Partnerships are fundamental to effective care** for people with complex and co-occurring needs.
- **Relationships between services matter**, with trust, communication and shared understanding underpinning successful collaboration.
- **Lived experience leadership strengthens service design and delivery**, ensuring initiatives remain person-centred and responsive.

- **Workforce capability building is a shared responsibility**, requiring collaboration across sectors and disciplines.
- **Networking and connection remain highly valued** by Alliance members and continue to be a core function of NEMHSCA.

The forum highlighted the strong commitment across NEMHSCA member organisations to working collaboratively, sharing expertise, and improving integrated care for consumers, families and carers. Thank you to all presenters, stall holders, participants and the Working Group members for contributing to a highly engaging and successful event.

