Integrating aged care assessment for older people of north-east Victoria

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Current assessment processes for older people entering the aged care system are fragmented and challenging, as acknowledged in the new government report, Living Longer, Living Healthier (2012). Different agencies employ different assessment tools, service models and diverse approaches. This paper reports findings from a collaborative project designed to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with building common assessment processes across three diverse services in a rural centre in north-east Victoria. By using a collaborative approach, the project team comprised three organisations—ACAS, HACC and Mental Health—in conjunction with a university research partner. The mixed methods design was conducted over three stages: (1) assessment of the policy context; (2) mapping of assessment processes across services; and (3) interviews across managers, practitioners as well as consumers and carers. Stage 2, which involved a comparative analysis of comprehensive assessment tools, revealed significant and key areas of data duplication, and commonalities and differences across the assessment and practice, and identified scope for developing compatible assessment processes. Building on this context, this presentation focuses on findings from Stage 3 of the project, which explored the experience of assessment processes and practices from the perspective of key stakeholders. The sample included the ‘professional’ cohort (n=25), including the direct line managers, CEOs and practitioners of the three agencies; and the older rural ‘consumers and carers’ cohort (n=16) who were current, or past recipients of the above services. The interviews were analysed for emergent themes. Findings highlighted the key challenges for assessment facilitation, implementation and engagement, as well as suggestions and innovations designed to improve the assessment experience. As widely understood, assessment informs the entrance and trajectory of care, it is has been therefore timely to consider the directives of the National Health Reforms (2011) and explore what is needed at the local level in order to develop a collaborative, integrated model of assessment to improve the gateway to the aged care system.