

ALERT: Findings from an evaluation of SVHM homelessness services (2015)

What is ALERT?

The Assessment, Liaison & Early Referral Team (ALERT) is a complex care service established in 2000 as a part of the Victorian Government's Hospital Demand Strategy to improve health outcomes and reduce demand on the emergency department.

ALERT aims to reduce hospital demand by providing coordinated care that bridges the gap between acute hospital ED and the community. ALERT particularly targets patients with complex psychosocial and medical needs, including frequent presenters experiencing homelessness.

"They tolerate the individual - in the person. So they don't just pigeon-hole you. They do respect you and they'll advise you." – Client

ALERT Service Usage in 2015

142 episodes of care

2,021 contacts with clients

95 days average length of care

29% supported by other SVHM homelessness services



Who used ALERT in 2015?

139 experiencing or at risk of homelessness accessed ALERT

74% male
26% female

46 average age

78% born in Australia

9% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

An ALERT Case Study:

A male patient in his 80's has complex medical conditions including nerve palsy and significant alcohol issues; he frequently presents to both SVHM and Royal Melbourne ED's.

He isn't eligible for Centrelink or crisis accommodation and despite significant mobility impairment, continues working at his casual cleaning job.

ALERT have supported him when he presents at ED, assisting with facilitating medical tests when needed and follow him up in a community setting to offer additional support and encourage attendance at outpatient appointments.

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Health Profile of ALERT Clients

Primary diagnoses at commencement:

- 43%** substance abuse causing mental and behaviour disorders
- 18%** injuries and fractures
- 10%** mental health disorders

Other issues experienced:

- 54%** daily living issues
- 47%** family and other relationship issues
- 46%** isolation issues



Impact of ALERT on Healthcare Utilisation

Overall in the six months after episode of care commencement with ALERT:

- 40%** decrease in number of clients who accessed ED
- 11%** decrease in total number of ED presentations and on average are 1.5 hours shorter!
- 39%** reduction in the number of unplanned inpatient admissions
- 7%** reduction in total length of stay of unplanned inpatient admissions

Cost Reductions Associated with Changes in Service Utilisation

Evaluation findings add to the growing evidence that targeted interventions for people who are homeless can reduce their use of more acute hospital services.

For the 102 people who had contact with ALERT only, there was an average cost decrease of:

\$1,302 per person in the six months following service contact

For the 36 people who had contact with both ALERT and The Cottage, there was an average cost decrease of:

\$3,529 per person in the six months following service contact

She's been really helpful. She's been really helpful indeed. Consistent and sincere. She's been genuinely interested in me being able to progress further down the line. – Client

"It's not just putting someone into crisis and then hoping that things pan out for them - that they fit one square box and that's it. But it's really engaging with them and seeing what they're capable of." – Service staff