# NATIONAL INITIAL ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL (IAR) FOR MENTAL HEALTHCARE GUIDANCE

# Consultation Information

## BACKGROUND

The Initial Assessment and Referral (IAR) for Mental Healthcare Guidance and Decision Support Tool (DST) assists general practitioners and clinicians in recommending a level of care for a person seeking mental health support. Each level of care is based on the least intensive and least intrusive evidence-based intervention that will likely lead to the most significant possible gain.

The IAR is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Health and brings together information from various sources, including Australian and international evidence and advice from leading experts.

The IAR is designed to assist the various parties involved in the assessment and referral process, including General Practitioners (GP), other clinicians and service providers and intake teams responsible for undertaking initial assessments, which may involve making recommendations on the level of care required.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the IAR Guidance and Decision Support Tool are that:

* A person seeking mental health assistance has their experiences understood in the context of holistic assessment domains (the **eight domains**).
* A person's treatment needs and recovery goals are understood and matched to a suitable service type and intensity based on the least intensive and least intrusive evidence-based intervention that will likely lead to the most significant possible gain (the **five levels of care**).
* A nationally consistent decision support tool is used to guide clinical judgement and consumer choice.
* A sector-wide framework is used for estimating and responding to service needs, reducing the frustration of referrals not being accepted.
* Initial assessment and referral information is communicated in a consistent and standardised way across the sector.
* It guides what information should be explored and considered when looking to match a person with a care type and intensity most likely to meet their treatment needs.
* It minimises the risks that arise through under-servicing (poor outcomes) and over-servicing (unnecessary burden of care for the individual).
* It brings together the assessment results rather than replaces (or requires additional) existing clinical assessment scales and processes.

## POLICY CONTEXT

The Department of Health (the Department) is expanding and implementing the Initial Assessment and Referral (IAR) tool into primary care settings to support General Practitioners and other specialists, allied health professionals and referrers to recommend a level of care for a person seeking mental health support based on the least intrusive evidence-based intervention that will lead to the most significant gain.

With the advice of clinical experts, the Department will expand the IAR to make it suitable for priority cohorts, starting with a lifespan approach to version development. This decision was based on advice relating to the different mental health experiences, developmental, social, decision-making abilities and treatment needs of children (aged 5-11), adolescents (aged 12-17), adults (aged 18-65) and older adults (65+).

## ADAPTATIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS

The current [IAR Guidance](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/primary-health-networks-phn-mental-health-care-guidance-initial-assessment-and-referral-for-mental-health-care) and [Decision Support Tool](https://iar-dst.online/#/) focuses on adults aged 18-65 years. In 2020-21, the Department commenced development of adapted guidance and a DST for children (aged 5-11) and separately for adolescents (aged 12-17).

Throughout 2021-22, the Department facilitated, through an Expert Advisory Group and a Working Group, an adaptation for older adults.

The process of developing the older adult version of the National IAR Guidance has incorporated the following steps:

* A Working Group was convened and comprised of members with considerable clinical and lived expertise in mental health for older adults.
* A Version Development Framework for older adults was developed for the Working Group, incorporating evidence and critical considerations to guide Working Group meeting discussions.
* Four Working Group meetings were facilitated alongside significant out-of-session input from members.
* The Expert Advisory Group, which is comprised of GPs, psychologists, nurses, social workers and lived experience representatives, met to review the draft and recommend the version for broader consultation following the development phase.

## CONSULTATION OBJECTIVES

The Guidance and a paper version of the Decision Support Tool for older adults has been drafted and is being released for consultation only. A consultation report will be prepared for the Department of Health and the IAR Expert Advisory Group.

The consultation findings will inform the finalisation of the IAR Guidance and Decision Support Tool for older adults, which is scheduled for finalisation and trial from early 2022-23.

## CONSULTATION TIMEFRAME

The consultation will be open from 20 May 2022 to 3 June 2022.

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The Department of Health has identified the following key stakeholders as critical to consultation and involvement in the project.

* Older adults, families, and carers with lived experience.
* General Practitioners.
* Peer workers and lived experience practitioners.
* Allied Mental Health Clinicians.
* Specialists (including psychiatrists and geriatricians).

This includes the following organisations and services:

* Primary Health Networks.
* Mental health services working with older adults.
* State and Territory Mental Health Services.
* Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.
* Peak bodies with a role in older adult mental health.
* Education providers.
* Community service providers (including Community Managed Organisations).
* Aged care services.
* Residential aged care facilities.

## CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES AND METHOD

The consultation materials and consultation survey can be accessed by visiting: <https://consultations.health.gov.au/primary-care-mental-health-division/consultation-draft-older-adults-national-iar>

The National Project Manager is also available for telephone and video consultations with groups and individuals where requested during the consultation period. These individual or group consultations will have a broad scope but are likely to focus on:

* PHN facilitated consultations with PHN representatives, local stakeholders, clinical councils, and community advisory committees.
* Consultations with members facilitated by peak bodies and professional colleges.
* Consultations with members facilitated by lived experience groups and peaks.
* Consultations with state and territory mental health and education agencies.

The National Project Manager will monitor consultation responses, and if responses from key stakeholders are lacking, the National Project Manager will take a pro-active engagement approach. The National Project Manager will also raise consultation gaps with the Department of Health and PHNs, requesting that the Department and PHNs activate their connections with stakeholders to highlight the consultation opportunity and the strategic importance of the project. There is also an opportunity for additional targeted consultation if further input from an identified key stakeholder group is required during or after the consultation period.

Please get in touch with the National Project Manager, Ms Jenni Campbell, to request a facilitated consultation with regional stakeholders by emailing [jenni.a.campbell@outlook.com](mailto:jenni.a.campbell@outlook.com)

For more information about the consultation process, please contact [MH.IARProject@health.gov.au](mailto:MH.IARProject@health.gov.au)

## ATTACHMENT 1 KEY CONSULTATION RESOURCES

Several draft resources will be released for consultation. There is a risk that people implement or begin using the resources before their finalisation (post-consultation). Therefore, the documents will be watermarked to caution against implementation and prohibit circulation. The online survey will also include this caution.

The following resources have been made available for consultation purposes and are included on the consultation portal:

1. Consultation Draft – Older Adults Lift Out (see attachment)
2. Summary of approach to and outcomes from IAR adaptations (see attachment)
3. Draft IAR Snapshot – Older Adults (see attachment)

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