Is your practice ready to support patients with eating disorders? Small changes that can make a big difference

Introducing InsideOut's new Waiting Room Kit for Practice Managers and frontline staff.

Understanding and acknowledging disordered eating behaviours in oneself can be a confronting and scary step. Feelings of guilt and shame are often triggered by well-meaning health messaging or comments in the waiting room or at the front desk.

"We must look at the person from their very first visit. They are feeling a whole lot of fear, and they don't know what's going to happen. We want to help contain that fear."

- *InsideOut Lived Experience Consultant*

Primary care plays a key role in the early identification and management of mental health concerns. Psychological issues have consistently ranked among the most common reasons for GP presentations since 2017, with 71% of GPs in 2024 reporting them among the top three reasons patients seek care [1].

InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders has worked with lived experience consultants and the InsideOut GP Hub team to develop a new 'Waiting Room Kit' to support practice managers and frontline staff. The resource provides practical guidance to help staff recognise and respond to disordered eating and eating disorders from the moment patients walk through the door.

Eating disorders – an overlooked issue

Eating disorders are a significant but often overlooked issue in Australia. Combined with disordered eating, they are estimated to affect 16.3% of the population [2]. Yet more than three-quarters (76.8%) of people experiencing an eating disorder report an unmet need for treatment [3].

Stigma, shame and fear of judgement can make it difficult for people to disclose concerns, while the nature of eating disorders can lead people to minimise or hide behaviours. Misconceptions among both the public and healthcare professionals can further contribute to eating disorders being overlooked or perceived as less serious than other mental health conditions [4,5].

For people who do not fit the stereotypical presentation, these barriers can delay diagnosis and access to care. Recognising the diverse presentations of eating disorders is therefore an important step for primary care practices in supporting earlier identification and appropriate referral.

Building a more supportive practice

"A high percentage of people experience these thoughts and feelings. Sometimes it's about reaffirming that you're not crazy, it's not all in your head, and what you're experiencing is serious and should be taken seriously. You're taking the right step by seeking help."

- InsideOut Lived Experience Consultant

Simple changes to the practice environment, such as displaying inclusive health information and providing evidence-based resources, can help normalise conversations about eating disorders and encouraging earlier help-seeking [6] [7].

The InsideOut GP Hub provides GPs and Practice Nurses with point-of-care digital supports and evidence-based clinical information, while the Practice Management Toolkit supports the wider practice team. The new Waiting Room Kit provides practical tools and resources to help practices create a safe, inclusive and validating environment for people experiencing eating disorders, as well as their families and carers.

The kit includes:

- **1-hour online training module** – helps Practice Managers and frontline staff build confidence in recognising and responding appropriately to people who may be experiencing an eating disorder.
- **Waiting room checklist** – practical actions and guidance to create a more supportive waiting room environment.
- **Posters** – inclusive, non-stigmatising messages for waiting rooms, bathrooms and consult rooms.
- **Free online treatment and support** – information about evidence-based support available through the InsideOut eClinic for patients, families and carers.
- **Brochures and business cards** – easy ways to connect patients and carers with free support.

Click here to access or scan the QR code

Small changes to the practice environment can make a meaningful difference. By creating a more welcoming and supportive experience from the moment someone walks through the door, practice staff can help reduce barriers to care and support earlier help-seeking.

References

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