

SUMMARY:

Evaluation of Outcomes in the Recovery Options Program

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Uniting WA engaged the Centre for Social Impact to conduct an independent evaluation of Recovery Options (RO), a community-based, person-led mental health program that provides 1:1 psychosocial support to participants.

The research sought to understand whether RO is making a meaningful difference for participants, identify areas for improvement, and uncover the systemic factors impacting recovery. Using a mixed-methods approach with recovery-oriented principles, the evaluation aims to inform better practice and drive sector-wide learning.

How are Participants supported?

Recovery Options Participants are supported by trained mentors to identify goals, build coping strategies, connect with services, and navigate systems like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and housing.

The program is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and commissioned by WA Primary Health Alliance.

Recovery Options operates through two streams

1. Rapid Support stream (3 months):
Immediate support for unmet needs.

2. Psychosocial Support stream (6–18 months):
Intensive, recovery-oriented mentoring and support.

Client Journey

Uniting WA's Recovery Options program supports people with complex and intersecting needs, especially those experiencing persistent distress, isolation, and systemic disadvantage. A typical client's journey begins with a referral and initial assessment then progresses to intensive support and recovery planning consisting of weekly meetings focused on goal setting and strength work. Support levels may decrease to fortnightly or another duration to meet client's needs as engagement continues. The program eventually moves towards exit with the role of the mentor slowly reducing.

Background

Recovery Options originally supported participants through the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) Program and Partners in Recovery (PIR) Program, before becoming a Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program (CPSP) during the NDIS transition. PHaMs and PIR participants were considered as likely to be eligible for NDIS, so RO also supported them in the transition.

This significantly reduced psychosocial support funding outside of the NDIS, and limited resources despite significant need.



I think it's life-changing for a lot of people... We'll get a lot of people who have had bad experiences [with mental health services] or they've never talked through their problems before. They might have only been in the medical side and had medication. So often we open up conversations around well-being, what life might look like, or what's going on within them that they've never considered before. STAFF INTERVIEW

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Evaluation Insights

- Relational support is foundational:** strong relationships built trust and enabled progress.
- Individual progress matters:** success reflected personal goals, not clinical measures.
- Autonomy and choice are highly valued:** person-led support is seen as empowering.
- Distress has social context:** housing and cost-of-living pressure drives mental health needs.
- Discharge is complex:** endings often felt abrupt and emotionally challenging.
- Strong sector relationships are critical:** for seamless referrals and collaborative care.

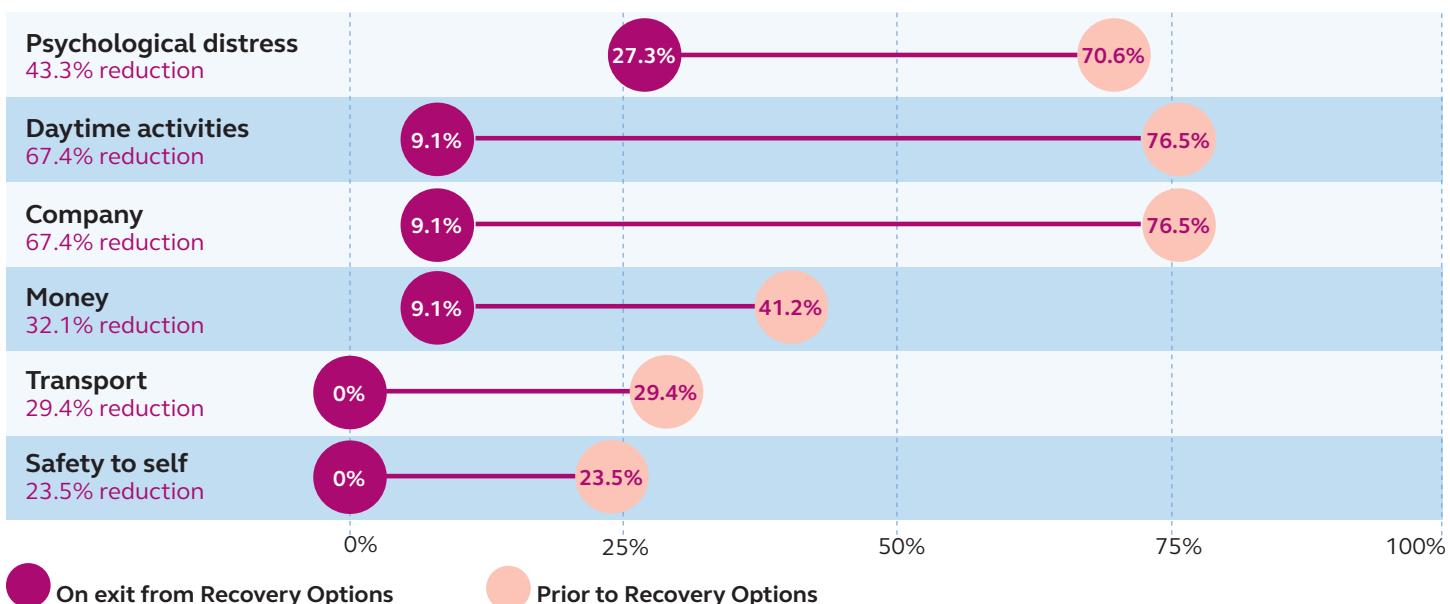
Program

Recommendations

- Increase flexible funding** to sustain holistic, person-led support.
- Centre choice & control** by keeping care responsive and empowering.
- Support exit transitions** with co-designed plans and warm referrals.
- Embed peer and community connection** early to reduce isolation.
- Resource goal-setting** so mentors can support practical, personal goals.
- Strengthen collaboration** with peer workers and community groups.
- Improve data and consent** for better measurement and coordinated care.

Key Findings

Participants significantly **improved their ability to meet key needs**.



Fewer people were experiencing **very high levels of distress**, dropping from 58% at the start to 40% when they finished the program.

On exit, **2 out of 3** participants felt better able to:

- Manage their mental wellbeing.
- Recognise early signs that may impact their wellbeing.
- Have strategies or seek support when needed.

More information

For more information about the Recovery Options program or this evaluation, please contact hello@unitingwa.org.au