Establishing the Connection (between alcohol and other drug use and sexual victimisation)

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The key aims of the 12-month *Establishing the Connection* project were to improve understanding of the complex intersections between AOD use and sexual violence and revictimisation, and to build the capacity of the sexual assault and AOD sectors to respond more effectively to the needs of affected individuals, their families and communities.

Little was previously known about if or how practitioners and clinicians from the sexual assault and AOD sectors were building a bridge between their services in order to support client referrals and shared learning. For this research, telephone interviews, an online survey and a key stakeholder forum/workshop were undertaken with workers at all levels of the sexual assault and AOD sectors in Victoria. We found that although most practitioners and clinicians were aware of the interrelationship between sexual victimisation and substance use, many lacked access to resources, formal referral processes and pathways, and information about how the other sector works – all tools which would enable them to respond to complex clients with co-occurring sexual trauma and substance use issues. Both sectors also identified the importance of policy in formalising and resourcing governance and collaborative structures.

The new knowledge generated by this research has resulted in the development of a set of shared Practice Guidelines. The Practice Guidelines are focused on providing practical information which aims to enable integrated service responses between the sexual assault and AOD sectors, by being appropriately situated within the actual opportunities and overcoming the specific barriers identified by the two sectors. The Guidelines include contextualising research and information on the relationship between sexual assault and AOD use, an outline of how each sector works, referral phone numbers, information links, and a guide on how to respond to clients with co-occurring sexual trauma and substance use.