



Volunteer Drug and Alcohol Counsellors' Training Program 2026

About the Program:

In 1989, the Volunteer Addiction Counsellors' Training Program commenced in Perth as a joint project between the Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO) and Curtin University. In 2001, the program was awarded a National Organisational Excellence award from the Ted Noffs Foundation, Sydney. The Program was also the winner of the prestigious WA 2001 Premier's Award for Public Sector Management, in the category of Social or Community Development. Since its inception, over 800 volunteer counsellors have been trained and have provided counselling services at a range of agencies in the metropolitan and regional areas of Western Australia. In July 2015, the DAO amalgamated with the Mental Health Commission (Commission). In 2018, expertise from the Commission, the National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University and Edith Cowan University (ECU) combined to present this Program.

The aim of the Program is to provide training and supervised placements to volunteer alcohol and other drug (AOD) counsellors. There are two major components to the program:

Training Program – Five months

An intensive training program held in Perth at the Commission commencing on 6 June 2026. Training comprises of 20, four-hour workshops held on consecutive Saturday mornings, on both general and AOD counselling skills and knowledge. Sessions on general counselling include active listening, empathy, reflection of feelings, problem solving and goal setting, supervision and confidentiality.

AOD counselling workshops include, theories of AOD dependence, prevalence of and reasons for AOD use, raising the issue of AOD use, AOD assessment, motivational interviewing, relapse and giving up, trauma informed care and practice, mental health and family inclusive practice. At the end of the training program in November a weekend of workshops is held at a function centre. The Program is provided free-of-charge. On successful completion of the training program, participants will be awarded a Certificate of Participation from the Commission and the National Drug Research Institute.



Volunteer Counsellor placement – 12 months (192 hours)

Shortly after the completion of the training program, participants commence a placement with one of the Program’s partner AOD agencies, in which volunteer counsellors provide a professional counselling service to clients.

It is important that the placement is viewed by the volunteer as a professional commitment to both the placement agency and their clients, and as a continuation of their learning. Volunteers are required to work a minimum of four hours counselling a week, for 12-months (up to 192 hours). During the placement, volunteer counsellors are assigned to a clinical supervisor who will oversee and support the volunteer counsellor, and volunteers will receive one hour of formal per fortnight.

A criminal record check will be required prior to commencing placement. However, past criminal convictions do not necessarily exclude participants from being placed in an agency, especially if these are of a minor, non-violent nature. Some placement agencies require workers to be fully vaccinated for COVID19 to work on-site and this policy will apply to volunteers on placement, not being vaccinated or not having a medical exemption will limit placement options.

Agencies offering placements include:

Service Provider	Locations / Services
Palmerston Association Inc. (Perth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Metro Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Fremantle, Mandurah, Rockingham) • Southeast Metro Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Thornlie, Armadale)
Cyrenian House (Perth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Metro Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Warwick, Joondalup, North Perth, Innaloo)
Holyoake (Victoria Park)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoake (Victoria Park) • North East Metro Community Alcohol and Drug Service (Midland) • Wheatbelt Community Alcohol and Drug Services (Northam)
Luma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Her Health and Wellbeing (Northbridge, Joondalup)



Qualification

Participants who complete the program and choose to enrol at ECU may apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the unit ADS1151 – Addiction Studies: Fundamental Concepts, through ECU's formal RPL assessment process.

Who should apply?

The Program accepts people from all sorts of different backgrounds, and with a diverse range of skills, knowledge and life experiences. However, as this Program is designed to provide participants with the knowledge and skills to provide safe, supportive and non-judgemental counselling to people with AOD problems, it is important that participants are emotionally intelligent, have self-awareness and are able to manage their own psychological issues in a way that does not compromise the well-being of the client.

People interested in applying to be a volunteer counsellor should possess:

- a commitment to working with people affected by AOD-related issues
- excellent interpersonal skills
- a non-judgemental attitude towards people who use AOD
- the capability to learn about and apply, evidence-based practice in the context of the unique needs of diverse people affected by AOD-related issues
- a willingness to complete the training and placement components of the Program
- English language literacy and verbal fluency
- basic computer literacy.

The following situations will exclude an application from being considered for the well-being of clients and the applicant:

- those who have experienced AOD-related problems within the past two years
- those who have experienced an AOD-related death of a significant other within the last two years
- people who will be absent for more than three training workshops
- those who have been living in the community following residential rehabilitation, prison or another institutional setting for less than two years
- those who are unable to commit to complete the training and placement components of the Program.

Application Outcomes

Due to the high volume of applications received, processing may take up to four weeks. Applicants will be notified of the outcome once assessments are completed. A shortlist of candidates will be invited to an interview in April 2026, and those who are not selected are encouraged to reapply for the following year's program.

For enquiries about the program, please email: AOD.Training@mhc.wa.gov.au or phone (08) 6553 0560