

Smart options for eating disorders

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As anorexia nervosa rates continue to climb, eating disorder experts are examining the efficiency and availability of treatment options in Australia's health system.

Increased demand for more services creates the need for smarter tailored service provision, says Flinders University Distinguished Professor of Psychology Tracey Wade, highlighting the value of a South Australian "Day Program" format which gives intensive daily treatment but no overnight admission treatments.

Accessible and more targeted professional [mental health](#) and welfare services for eating disorders is vital with community prevalence of anorexia nervosa steadily rising over the past two decades.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows a significant increase in overnight hospital admissions for anorexia nervosa in young Australian females (aged 15–29) in the past two decades, but a separate study in Australasian Psychiatry indicated this not reflected in mortality rates and community incidence.

"The good news is that [mortality rates](#) and average hospital inpatient length of stay for anorexia nervosa declined during the study period," says Flinders University academic and co-author in the study Dr. Stephen Allison.

Professor Wade, co-author of another study in *Nutrients*, says improving the quality of targeted services is more important than providing more general services for these conditions and other eating disorders.

A new study of 56 [patients](#) using the Statewide Eating Disorder Service in Adelaide, SA assessed whether meal options for a streamlined day program provided adequate support and incentives for [young women](#) (average age 25) to self-manage disordered eating conditions including anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

The study tentatively concludes that moderate decrease in costs but increasing opportunities for [patient autonomy](#) did not negatively impact outcomes.

"Both for hospital, partial hospital day programs and other treatments, we must continue to monitor clinical outcomes, as well as any additional disadvantage to patients including food for meals, staffing levels and [patient care](#)," says Professor Wade, director of the Órama Institute for

Mental Health and Well-Being and the Blackbird Initiative at Flinders University.

The Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor of Psychology has been instrumental in setting up the SA Day Program and is a credentialed eating disorder clinician.

The researchers recommended further research on a larger cohort of patients to identify the best formats for specific groups of [eating disorders](#).

More information: Ertimiss Eshkevari et al, Eating Disorder Day Programs: Is There a Best Format?, *Nutrients* (2022). [DOI: 10.3390/nu14040879](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14040879)

Martin Nguyen et al, Increasing hospital admission rates for anorexia nervosa amongst young women in Australia from 1998 to 2018, *Australasian Psychiatry* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/10398562221077890](https://doi.org/10.1177/10398562221077890)

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