

# The benefits of counselling after a cardiac event: Improvements in anxiety, depression and distress for cardiac patients attending the Cardiac Counselling Clinic

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## Abstract

### *Introduction*

Mental health problems are common after acute coronary events and compromise recovery. Psychological interventions have been shown in clinical trials to improve mental health but have rarely been translated into routine practice. The Australian Centre for Heart Health's *Cardiac Counselling Clinic* (CCC) provides psychological counselling to people with coronary artery disease (CAD). The present evaluation study assessed improvements in mental health for CAD patients attending the CCC.

### *Method*

A sample of 101 CAD patients who completed counselling between 2020 and 2024 provided demographic, medical and psychological information. Anxiety, depression and distress were assessed at intake and discharge using validated instruments. The Kornbrot Rank Difference Test, McNemar Test and Reliable Change Index (RCI) calculation were used to assess statistically significant and clinically meaningful change after counselling. Logistic regression was used to identify the characteristics of clients less likely to improve.

### *Results*

Median scores and categorical clinical classification significantly improved on all three clinical indicators from intake to discharge. Most clients who made a statistical improvement in clinical class also met RCI criteria for reliable improvement (68% for anxiety, 81% depression, 93% distress). Non-improvement of clinical symptoms was observed in 14-22% clients. Several 'red flags' such as financial distress and lack of a close confidante predicted clinical non-improvement.

### *Conclusion and implications*

The evaluation demonstrates the value of the CCC in providing effective mental health support post-cardiac event. There is potential to expand and complement this psychological service with other social services to provide comprehensive psychosocial care to Australia's cardiac population.