

## Section 5: Health care systems assessment

### 5.1 HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS ASSESSMENT

This section explains why a health systems assessment is useful to inform the service stocktake, how to undertake such an assessment using a *systems assessment tool* (SAT), and how to collate and plot the results of the review.

The information in this section has been summarised from material developed to support the Menzies School of Health Research ABCD project. We acknowledge and thank the Menzies School of Health Research for allowing this material, including the SAT, to be used in the *Healthy for Life* Service Toolkit.

The SAT was adapted by the ABCD project, and is very useful in assisting health staff to assess their systems, to identify priorities for improvement and to monitor progress towards achieving their goals. In its modified form, it's useful for assessing prevention and management strategies.

The SAT is used to assess a range of elements of health service systems that are important in delivering effective chronic illness care, and has been adapted for use by organisations providing primary care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. With minor adaptations, it's also expected to be appropriate for many other settings.

The SAT incorporates the guiding principles of the Innovative Care for Chronic Conditions Framework:

- evidence-based decision making;
- population focus;
- prevention focus;
- quality focus;
- integration; and
- flexibility and adaptability.

The tool will be used most effectively in conjunction with the WHO report, *Innovative care for chronic conditions: Building blocks for action*. Organisations are encouraged to download this document and take time to read and consider the information in it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Innovative care for chronic conditions: Building blocks for action global report*. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2002. Accessible at [http://www.who.int/chronic\\_conditions/iccreport/en/](http://www.who.int/chronic_conditions/iccreport/en/)

### 5.1.1 Why do a health care systems assessment?

It's widely recognised that health services need to be re-oriented to more effectively address the increasing burden of chronic illness, as well as ongoing demands for acute care. Health care organisations need practical tools to guide their efforts and evaluate changes in chronic illness care.

Undertaking a health care systems assessment using the ABCD SAT provides:

- an assessment of the state of the health service systems;
- guidance on the next steps in planning improvements in chronic illness care; and
- an assessment of progress in achieving systems improvement.

Activities and programs relevant to chronic illness care can be considered in three areas:

- clinical services for people known to have chronic illness;
- clinical services for the prevention and early detection of chronic illness, including screening, case finding, and brief intervention or counselling—generally health centre based, one-to-one activities; and
- community or population based programs and activities and ancillary programs (e.g. nutrition, smoking, alcohol, physical activity, oral/dental, mental health, environmental health).

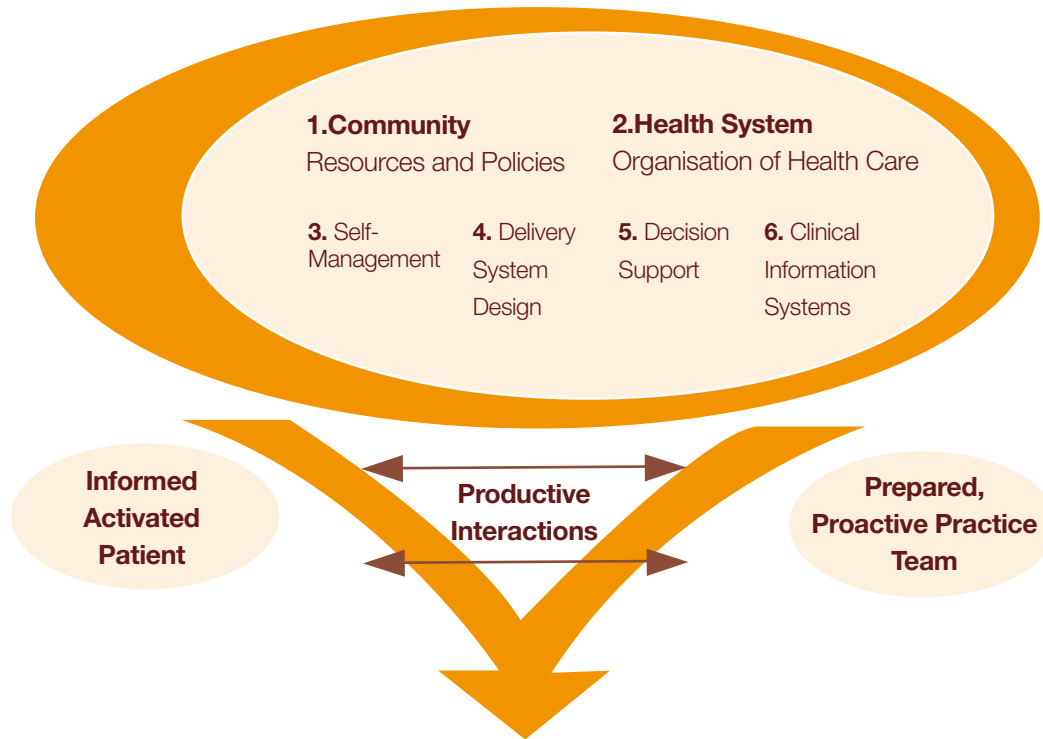
Each of these three areas of activity is important to the effective prevention and management of chronic illness. The quality of systems to support each area may differ quite markedly within the same health service. The scoring form for the SAT allows for separate scoring for each area.

The SAT can easily be applied to systems supporting the first two categories of service above (clinical services). Applying the tool to assess the third category (community and population based activities) may be more challenging.

The prompts provided in the SAT are intended as a guide to the types of system issues that you might consider for scoring, but don't cover all relevant issues for all organisations.

The SAT reviews the seven domains of care identified in Wagner's model for chronic disease care, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.1. Table 5.1.1. outlines examples of the types of issues that are considered in each domain.

**Figure 5.1.1 Wagner's chronic disease care model**



**Table 5.1.1 Systems assessment tool domains**

DOMAIN	EXAMPLE
1. Organisation	Business plans
2. External links	Work with community groups
3. Self-management	Brief interventions
4. Decision support	Evidence-based guidelines (e.g. CARPA)
5. Delivery systems design	Designated chronic disease position
6. Information systems	Population lists
7. Integration of chronic care models	Staff education on chronic care model

## 5.1.2 Guidelines for completing the SAT survey and collating results

The most value is gained when a SAT survey form is completed as a group exercise. This helps team members understand the intent of each question clearly and promotes discussion. It's also recommended that a facilitator moderates group discussions and ensures that all group members have an opportunity to share their views on each item.

The ABCD project has developed the *Facilitator's Guide for Completing the Systems Assessment Tool (SAT)*. The guide is included in this Toolkit, and should be followed in planning and completing the survey. The guide also provides direction on how to collate and feed back the information, and on using it for goal setting and planning.

Once completed, your organisation will end up with a score, in a format similar to that in Table 5.1.2, for the three main areas in chronic illness care:

- clinical services for people with chronic illness
- clinical services for prevention and early detection
- community or population based programs and activities or ancillary programs.

**Table 5.1.2 Example scoring summary**

	SCORE	AVERAGE	LEVEL OF SUPPORT
1. Total organisation of health care system	15/3	5	Basic support
2. Total links with community and external service providers	16/4	4	Basic support
3. Total self-management score	8/4	2	Limited support
4. Total decision support score	14/2	7	Good support
5. Total delivery system design score	54/9	6	Good support
6. Total clinical information systems score	42/6	7	Good support
7. Total intergration score	30/6	5	Basic support

### 5.1.3 Excel template to plot SAT scores

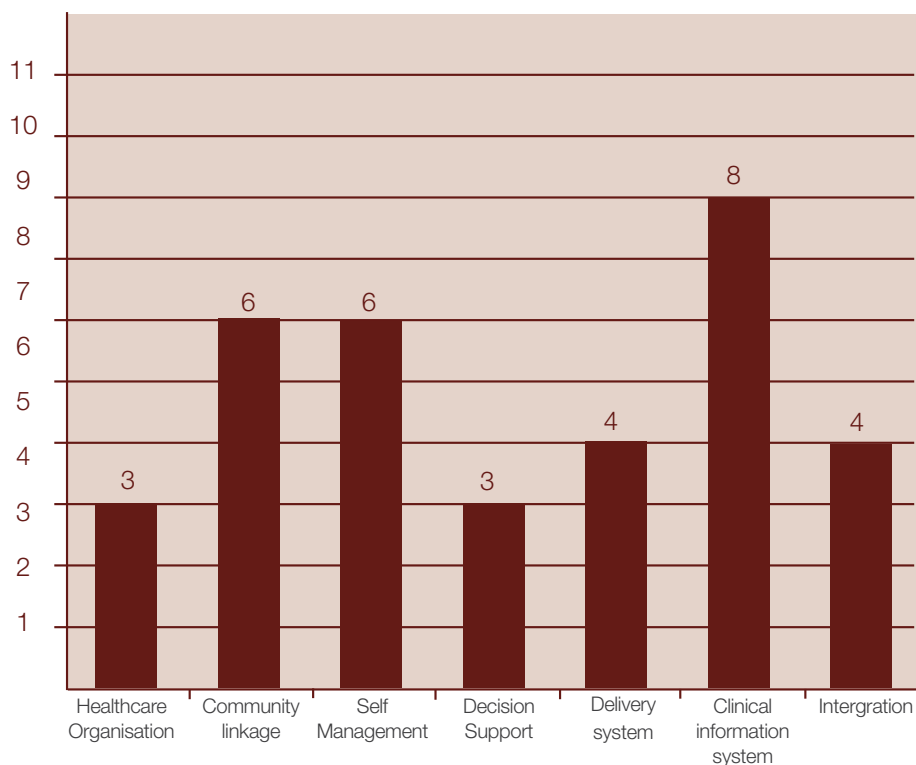
An Excel spreadsheet template has been developed to plot the SAT scores as bar graphs and spider diagrams, and is included on the CD in the Toolkit.

- 1 Open the Excel template and save the file with a suitable name.
- 2 Enter the scores into the table:

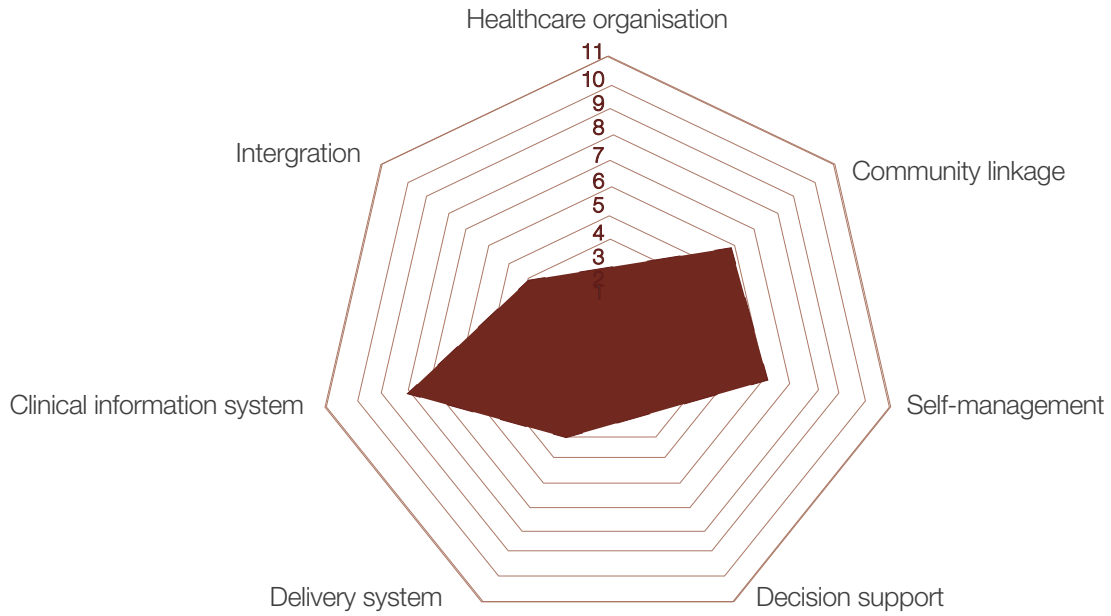
DOMAIN	SCORE
Healthcare organisation	3
Community linkage	6
Self-management	6
Decision support	3
Delivery system	4
Clinical information system	8
Integration	4

- 3 A bar graph and spider diagram (figures 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 are examples) will be generated automatically when scores are entered.

**Figure 5.1.2 SAT bar chart**



**Figure 5.1.3 SAT spider diagram**



After undertaking the systems assessment activities, services should think about which domains require the most development and use this information to inform the development of their Action Plan.