Instructions for self-training.

How to administer the eASSIST- the

*Electronic* version of the ASSIST (Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test)

and linked Brief Intervention

Prepared by Monica Beshara, final year Health Psychology student, University of Adelaide July 2011, and Dr Rachel Humeniuk, DASSA.
Introduction

This brief guide aims to facilitate the self-training of healthcare workers (eg. social workers, psychologist, GPs etc) in appropriate and effective use of the *Electronic* version of the ASSIST known as the eASSIST and linked Brief Intervention. Specifically, a number of steps are provided to guide healthcare workers in developing the necessary skills and confidence to both personally use these tools, as well as assist colleagues and students/trainees in acquiring the necessary skills and confidence. Training in the use of the eASSIST and Brief Intervention is particularly useful for healthcare professionals whose role may potentially involve contact with substance users, or who work with individuals whose substance use may place them at increased risk of harm compared with the general population.

This guide is to be used in conjunction with the training manuals listed under the list of materials required for self-training below, as well as the online resources outlined. Upon working through the steps provided, should you have any further questions or queries regarding appropriate use of the ASSIST and associated tools please contact Dr. Rachel Humeniuk (Rachel.Humeniuk@sa.gov.au) or Dr. Chris Holmwood (Chris.Holmwood@sa.gov.au).

Background on the eASSIST and Brief Intervention

In response to the overwhelming public health burden associated with problematic substance use, the World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with specialist addiction researchers and clinicians developed the ASSIST in 1997. The ASSIST and Brief Intervention were developed for use in primary health care settings, with the main aim of facilitating the early detection and treatment of substance misuse problems.

In 2011, Drug and Alcohol Services SA introduced an electronic version of the ASSIST known as the eASSIST. The eASSIST is an 8-item interviewer administered online questionnaire, which screens for the use of a variety of substances including: tobacco products, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), sedatives and sleeping pills, hallucinogens, inhalants, opioids and other drugs. The *Electronic* version of the ASSIST takes around 5 to 9 minutes to administer and score, and provides a brief and easy to use alternative to the hardcopy ASSIST questionnaire.

Clients’ responses to items on the eASSIST are entered by the healthcare professional, and a results table of risk scores is automatically generated. Client’s risk scores are then recorded onto a hardcopy of the Feedback Report Card and used to facilitate discussion (ie. brief intervention) regarding individuals’ substance use. Risk scores (ie. ‘lower’, ‘moderate’ or ‘high’ risk’), assist in determining the most appropriate intervention for the individual depending on their level of use (ie. ‘no treatment’, ‘brief intervention’, ‘referral to specialist assessment’ etc).

The ASSIST-linked Brief Intervention is a short (3 to 15 minute) intervention specifically designed to be administered to clients’ at ‘moderate risk’ from their substance use. That is, individuals who are not dependent, but whose current substance use may be causing health, social, legal, occupational or financial problems. Feedback and discussion around the scores on the ASSIST Feedback Report Card form the basis of the Brief Intervention, as well as take home materials including the “Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide”. The Brief Intervention is not designed to treat individuals who are dependent or at ‘high risk’ from their substance use, but can be used to encourage such clients to accept a referral to specialised drug and alcohol assessment and treatment.
Materials required for self-training using the eASSIST and Brief Intervention

1. Training manuals:
   - ‘The Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST): Manual for use in primary care’ (ensure that the appendix is also printed).

These are available on the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST) under ‘Self-training resources for clinicians’. Alternatively these can be accessed on the 'Introduction screen' on the eASSIST.

2. Access to the eASSIST
   - The eASSIST is available from the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)

3. Hard copy of training resources and client self-help materials:

   Training resources
   - Two client scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘Dave’)
   - The ASSIST Brief Intervention- 10 simple steps

   Client self-help materials
   - ‘Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide’
   - ASSIST risk of injecting card for clients

These can be individually accessed through the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)

4. Additional training resources:
   - Demonstration WHO ASSIST V3.0/3.1
   - Demonstration WHO ASSIST V3.0/3.1 Feedback Report Card.
   - ASSIST demonstration DVD
   - Brief Intervention demonstration DVD

While these training resources are for the hardcopy version of the ASSIST, the ASSIST and Brief Intervention clips may still prove a useful guide in terms of familiarising oneself with the administration procedure (ie. the introduction and questions), as well as how to approach administration of the brief intervention. Feel free to follow along using the completed ASSIST and ASSIST Feedback Report Card if you also plan on also the ASSIST in hardcopy form; if not, simply view the demonstration clips.

These resources are available from the SA Health website on the ASSIST page (www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST)
Step-by-step Instructions for *Electronic* administration of the eASSIST and linked Brief Intervention.

Please note that the following is just a guide, and that individual learning style as well as previous drug and alcohol related knowledge and experience should be considered when working through these steps.

**Step 1:** Ensure that you have access to the materials listed under ‘Materials required for eASSIST self-training’ (p. 3).

**Tips/recommendations:**

- Access to the training manuals and the eASSIST (online questionnaire) are your first priority; other training tools (eg. scripts, demonstration clips) can be accessed at a later stage.

**Step 2:** Familiarise yourself with the content of the ‘The Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST): Manual for use in primary care’.

**Tips/recommendations:**

- Please note that both the ASSIST and Brief Intervention manuals are quite comprehensive and may require more than one sitting to work through.

- Chapters 2 to 6 provide a comprehensive introduction to the ASSIST, information on who should use the ASSIST and with whom, as well as the rationale behind screening for substance use. It is imperative that the intended use of the ASSIST, as well as its limitations (ie. it is not a diagnostic tool) are well understood prior to its use.

- Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the problems related to substance use, and the health problems associated with use of particular substances. These chapters require only brief review as the eASSIST provides on screen prompts regarding the key problems associated with each substance.

- Although the eASSIST provides guided administration (eg. an introduction, prompts etc), it is still helpful to review Chapters 9 and 11, which focus on additional factors related to administration (eg. the importance of empathy and being non-judgemental, need to rephrase items for some clients etc) even if you have previous experiencing administrating screening tools/health related measures.

- Chapters 13 to 15 are less relevant to the eASSIST as these chapters focus on scoring. It is important to note, however, that the trickiest aspect of ASSIST scoring relates to classification of clients frequency-related responses into the ASSIST categories (eg. ‘monthly’, ‘weekly’ etc). Page 22 and 23 provide a guide on classifying frequency responses, as well as some practice questions to test your knowledge. The eASSIST automatically provides summary risk scores for each substance used by the client. In addition, the eASSIST provides reminders (on the right hand side of the screen) regarding how to classify clients’ frequency of use of substances that may not be clearly consistent with the eASSIST categories (eg. ‘Monthly’, ‘Weekly’ etc).
Step 3: Familiarise yourself with the content of the Brief Intervention training manual.

Tips/recommendations

- Chapters 2 and 3 provide an overview of the Brief Intervention, its use and the importance of brief intervention in primary care.

- Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical basis for the intervention, as well as components and motivational interviewing. Ensure that you are familiar with stages of behaviour change (Chapter 4), as well as components of effective brief intervention—FRAMES and motivational interviewing (Chapters 5 & 6).

- Chapter 7 provides a step by step approach to administering the ASSIST-linked brief intervention. Work through this carefully, and ensure you are familiar with the sequence of questions, when to refer to the Feedback Card, how to personalise feedback, how to best word advice and non-judgmentally encourage clients to raise their own concerns regarding their use. Examples of administering the Brief Intervention are provided in Chapters 9 and 10. (The procedure for administrating the brief intervention will become clearer when viewing the demonstration clip—Step 6).

Step 4: Familiarise yourself with the eASSIST

Tips/recommendations:

- The best way to familiarise yourself with the eASSIST is to attempt to navigate through the online questionnaire screens (ie. provide responses to items), and take note of the various prompts (eg. scoring assistance) and resources provided (eg. drug information, referral information etc).

- It is best to attempt navigating through the eASSIST after having read the ASSIST and Brief Intervention manuals specified in Steps 2 and 3. This will ensure that your knowledge regarding the theoretical basis and use of the eASSIST, and Brief Intervention is more complete.

Step 5: Take time to familiarise yourself with the self-help materials provided to clients following the Brief Intervention. These include both the ‘Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use: A guide’ and the ‘ASSIST risk of injecting card for clients’.

Tips/recommendations:

- Clients at high risk from their substance use may require further assessment and intervention. The eASSIST provides information on state and territory specific drug and alcohol services (screen 11), which can be saved as PDF and printed.

- It is important that you are familiar with the resources being given to clients should clients have any questions, or wish to further discuss the strategies listed in the guide.
• In addition to the resources listed above, ensure that your work place (eg. Psychology practice, GP clinic etc) has educational materials (eg. brochures etc) on the specific substances screened by the ASSIST (eg. alcohol, tobacco, cannabis etc), to provide clients with following the brief intervention.

Step 6: View the ASSIST and Brief Intervention demonstration clips available on the SA Health website at: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/ASSIST.

Tips/recommendations

• While these training resources are for the hardcopy version of the ASSIST, the ASSIST and Brief Intervention clips may still prove a useful guide in terms of familiarising oneself with the administration procedure (ie. the introduction and questions), as well as how to approach administration of the brief intervention. Feel free to follow along using the completed ASSIST and ASSIST Feedback Report Card if you also plan on also the ASSIST in hardcopy form; if not, simply view the demonstration clips.

• Pay special attention to the way in which the interviewee asks and clarifies questions, uses reflection and summarises the client’s concerns, provides objective advice, as well as her overall communication style (ie. respectful, non-judgmental, empathetic and objective).

• It may be useful to view these clips more than once to ensure you are comfortable with the eASSIST administration procedure, as well as administration of the Brief Intervention before practising with a volunteer or colleague.

Step 7: Practice administration and scoring of the eASSIST with volunteer or colleague using the practice scripts.

Tips/recommendations:

• Two client scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘Dave’) are provided in Appendix G of the ASSIST Manual. These are to be used in role plays with two people (one playing the health worker and one playing the client) to practice using the ASSIST and getting administration and scoring correct prior to use with clients. While these were developed for use with hardcopy ASSIST, the same script can be used to practice administration of the eASSIST and the overall score on the eASSIST compared with that on the scores accompanying the script.

• Ensure that any discrepancies between the scores generated by the eASSIST (ie. response items entered by the interview), and the correct scores provided with the script are highlighted, discussed and corrected.
**Step 8:** Practice administration of the Brief intervention.

**Tips/recommendations:**

- Review the scripted example of the suggested 10 step ASSIST-linked brief intervention for a 22 year old female client scoring in the moderate risk range for amphetamine-type stimulants, tobacco and cannabis (Chapter 9 in Brief Intervention Manual).

- Review the scripted example of a longer intervention for a 33 year old male client scoring in the moderate risk range for cannabis use (Chapter 11 page 34-37 in the Brief Intervention Manual).

- Using the scores provided in the client scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘Dave’), practice administering the ASSIST-linked brief intervention to a volunteer or colleague for one of the ‘moderate risk’ substances (e.g. Cannabis for the David script).

**Step 9:** Review

- Work through the ‘Checklist for eASSIST and Brief Intervention self-training’ (p. 8)
- Review content of ASSIST and Brief Intervention manuals, and skill development activities (e.g. demonstration clips, practising with client scripts) as required.

**Checklist for eASSIST and Brief Intervention self-training:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I am familiar with the content of the ASSIST Manual (e.g. administration, scoring).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I am familiar with the content of the Brief Intervention Manual (e.g. model of behaviour change, motivational interviewing etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have navigated my way through the eASSIST (online questionnaire) and am familiar with its key features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am familiar with the client-related resources (e.g. self-help strategies guide, and ASSIST risk of injecting card for clients).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have viewed the ASSIST and Brief Intervention demonstration clips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have had the opportunity to practice administering the eASSIST with a volunteer or colleague using the scripts (‘Chloe’ and ‘David’) provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have had the opportunity to review the scripted examples outlining administration of the Brief Intervention (Chapter 9 and 11 in Brief intervention manual).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I have had the opportunity to practice administration of the Brief Intervention with a volunteer or colleague.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>