

COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among Australians who use drugs

OLIVIA PRICE¹, PAUL DIETZE^{1,2,3,4}, LISA MAHER⁵, GREG DORE⁵, MALLORY TRENT⁵, RACHEL SUTHERLAND¹, ANTONIA KARLSSON¹, JULIA UPOROVA¹, UDESHA CHANDRASENA¹, DAISY GIBBS¹, ROSIE SWANTON¹, CAROLINE SALOM^{1,6}, SIMON LENTON^{1,7}, RAIMONDO BRUNO^{1,8}, LOUISA DEGENHARDT¹, MICHAEL FARRELL¹, AMY PEACOCK^{1,8}

¹National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney, Sydney, Australia, ²Behaviour and Health Risks, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia, ³National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Melbourne, Australia, ⁴School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, ⁵Kirby Institute, Sydney, Australia, ⁶Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, ⁷National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth, Australia, ⁸School of Psychological Sciences, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia

Presenter's email: o.price@unsw.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: The success of Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program is dependent on high levels of vaccine uptake, which may be undermined by vaccine hesitancy. In 2019, 3.4 million Australians reported past year illicit drug use. Therefore, establishing rates of vaccine hesitancy and barriers to uptake among people who use drugs is of public health importance.

Design and Methods: The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) and Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) are national cross-sectional studies comprising annual surveys with sentinel samples of people who inject drugs (PWID) and people who use ecstasy and related stimulants, respectively. In both studies, participants reported their COVID-19 vaccination status and unvaccinated participants reported barriers to uptake. PWID only were asked whether a pre-determined list of vaccination characteristics, settings, rewards and penalties would facilitate their vaccine uptake. Data on vaccine uptake, hesitancy and facilitators will be presented descriptively. Finally, logistic regression will be used to establish factors associated with vaccine hesitancy.

Results: Data collection is ongoing and will be completed in July. Preliminary results indicate vaccine hesitancy is higher among PWID (53%) than people who regularly use ecstasy (25%). Key barriers reported among both groups related to vaccine safety, vaccine side effects, and low risk perception of contracting COVID-19.

Discussions and Conclusions: These findings are highly relevant to current vaccine rollout in Australia. Results may inform targeted rollout of vaccines to people who use drugs. Understanding facilitators to vaccine uptake among PWID is particularly pertinent given the high level of hesitancy.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Drug Trends (including the EDRS and IDRS) and the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the Drug and Alcohol Program. AP is supported by an NHMRC Investigator Fellowship (#1174630). PD is funded by an NHRMC Senior Research Fellowship (#1136090). LM is supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Research Fellowship (#1154839). AP has received untied educational grant from Seqirus and Mundipharma for study of opioid medications. PD has received untied educational grant from Gilead sciences for work related to hepatitis C and an untied educational grant from Indivior. PD and SL have served as an unpaid member of an Advisory Board for Mundipharma. RB has received untied educational grant from Mundipharma and Indivior for study of opioid medications. LD has received untied

*educational grants from Seqirus, Indivior and Mundipharma for study of opioid medications.
All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.*