

ABSTRACT: Preliminary qualitative findings of the "code" study of the impacts of COVID-19 on people who use drugs

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Introduction / Issues: Government responses and public health interventions to prevent COVID-19 transmission in Australia, including international and domestic border closures, physical distancing measures and restrictions on gatherings and movement, have directly affected drug markets and the social and structural conditions of drug use. Limited studies have focused on these effects, particularly from the perspective of people who use drugs in an Australian context.

Method / Approach: In-depth face-to-face interviews are being conducted with approximately 76 participants recruited from the Burnet Institute's (Melbourne) SuperMIX and VMAX longitudinal cohort studies involving people who inject drugs and people who use methamphetamine, respectively. Interviews are focused on experiences of COVID and associated restrictions, and impacts on housing, income support, health and social service use, drug use and interactions with law enforcement.

Key Findings: We will present preliminary findings on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions (including during Melbourne stage 4 lock downs) on patterns of drug use, drug using networks and drug market functioning (including availability, purity, and prices), and associated changes in risk behaviours and physical and social health and wellbeing. This research is in progress; thus, results are pending at the time of submission.

Discussions and Conclusions: Findings will inform policy and practice responses to minimise and prevent the unintended physical and social health harms associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, for people who use drugs.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This work was supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Project Grant (APP2003255). Mark Stoové has received investigator initiated research funding from Gilead Sciences and AbbVie and consultant fees from Gilead Sciences for activities unrelated to this work.