

## Tensions arising when designing high-risk drug alerts for health professionals

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**Introduction/Issues:** Illicit drug markets are unpredictable with new substances emerging and established drugs varying in quality and potency. This unpredictability poses a threat to public health, leading to significantly increased risk of harms, including hospitalisations and deaths. Clinical drug alerts have potential to avert these acute harms by preparing professionals to respond to unusual drug-related events and distribute information to service-users. Here, we discuss the tensions that arose through the process of co-designing clinical drug alert templates.

**Method/Approach:** We used an iterative mixed-methods co-design framework to design and test a clinical alert prototype. Victorian health professionals who work with people who use drugs (including peer workers, alcohol and other drug workers and managers) participated in a scoping survey (n=186) and four co-design workshops (n=32).

**Key Findings:** Timely drug market data was universally considered important, yet many participants reported inadequate access. Designing effective clinical drug alerts could be complicated by the heterogeneity of this group in terms of roles, technical knowledge and work environments. Alerts need to be comprehensive to address the needs of multiple audiences, while also being concise to cut through information overload and reach time-poor professionals. Messaging must be carefully framed to effectively convey risk without perpetuating fear or stigma, undermining alert credibility, or inadvertently promoting particular substances. Recurring themes were that alerts must be consistent, immediately identifiable, and disseminated from a single credible source.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** The co-design process revealed complexities in designing important communication documents, particularly in the context of stigmatised illicit drug use, tightly controlled access to data sources, and workforce diversity.

**Implications for Practice/Policy:** Drug alerts should be closely developed with their target audiences to ensure that they are relevant, useful and impactful. These findings have informed the development of our drug alert prototypes, and provide local context to complement existing best-practice risk-communications literature.

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