

# **Language matters: the development of a resource to improve treatment access and reduce stigma in drug and alcohol treatment settings through a community partnership model**

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## **Objectives**

Language mediates our perceptions of the world around us and is a potent measure of our attitudes towards people who inject and/or use drugs. It has a powerful impact on how people who inject and/or use drugs view themselves. Stigmatising language is a barrier to accessing treatment across health care settings with 80% of people who inject drugs in Australia encountering stigma when seeking care. The NSW Users & AIDS Association and Network of Alcohol & Other Drugs Agencies partnered to develop a resource aimed at promoting the use of person-centred language in community-based drug and alcohol treatment settings suitable for the Australian context.

## **Methods**

Resource development consisted of three phases: Review of current language guides, focus groups with key stakeholders and refining and further testing the resource with expert reviewers. Fifty-eight key experts were consulted during development phases.

## **Results**

The “Language Matters” resource has quickly been taken up by service providers across Australia with social media attention and requests to reprint indicating a strong need for such a resource developed for the local context.

## **Conclusion**

Our attitudes towards substance use and how we respond rests on the concepts and language we use. We need to be less ambivalent, and more mindful and deliberate about avoiding pejorative terms. Changing our language is an essential step towards person-centred treatment and reducing the stigma and marginalisation of people who use drugs.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

No conflict of interest