

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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Background

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 also has a powerful impact on how people who inject and/or use drugs view themselves. Stigmatising language is a barrier to accessing hepatitis C treatment across health care settings with 80% of people who inject drugs in Australia encountering stigma when seeking care. Reducing stigma is a key target in Australian national and jurisdictional hepatitis C strategies given the goal of hepatitis C elimination by 2028. 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 guides located resources from comparable settings that were then combined to produce a draft guide. We then trialled the guide with consumer and service provider focus groups. Key stakeholders were then consulted to refine the resource and guide the style of the final guide.

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, more mindful and deliberate about avoiding pejorative terms. Changing our language 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

Stream:

Research abstracts, Linkage to HCV care and treatment among PWID