

Enhancing harm reduction services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who inject drugs through improved engagement: lessons learned using the CONSIDER Statement.

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Background: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who inject drugs (PWID) have high rates of blood borne viruses (BBVs) and sexually transmissible infections (STIs) compared to non-Indigenous Australians who inject. Accessible, culturally responsive, and high-quality harm reduction services, including regional services, are essential for addressing this disparity. However, there is limited understanding of stakeholder perspectives to guide service design, and this is exacerbated by limited engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PWID. This project used the CONSIDER Statement to critically reflect on this project's research design and governance, as a foundation for increased stakeholder engagement.

Methods: The research was a partnership between university-based researchers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health organisations, and community-based harm reduction services. Participants were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had injected drugs within the last 12 months, recruited at NSPs in two regional sites, and one major city. The CONSIDER statement was used as an analytic framework to report on the research undertaken with Indigenous communities.

Results: Research process was consistent with some domains of the CONSIDER Statement. A valuable aspect of the research (aligned with domains 3- 4: research relationships), was the involvement of Aboriginal service providers, researchers, and consumers in all research stages. This appeared to be associated with increased NSP client engagement (in BBV/STI testing and referral); 30% of participants were new clients. Community-based services 'vouched' for the research and participants referred friends in response to an unconditional recruitment incentive. Areas for improvement were identified.

Conclusion: Stakeholder and consumer involvement can provide guidance on how to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PWID. Our findings will inform guidelines for enhancing harm reduction services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PWID.

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