

“We’re gonna want to know the label’s right”: Co-designing a drug checking service for anabolic-androgenic steroid (AAS) consumers

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Introduction: Of the current harm reduction initiatives available drug checking is presently surrounded by the most contention in Australia. Drug checking is an integrated service allowing consumers to have their substances analysed and receive harm reduction advice. With the advent of drug checking in Queensland, where there is a high proportion of anabolic-androgenic steroid (AAS) users, this study scoped the needs of a traditionally marginalised group of substance consumers.

Method: This study conducted exploratory interviews with AAS consumers (N=15) regarding AAS testing practices, and what a drug checking service for AAS would look like. Data were analysed thematically.

Key Findings: A narrative was developed with four overarching themes: “You’re basically playing Russian Roulette”: Dangers of current AAS use, Respected Brands: The social and peer networks dictating supply, “Yeah, we’re gonna want to know the label’s right”: Service design for AAS consumers, and “Steroids is something which is often overlooked: Integrating drug checking and harm reduction into public health response.

Discussions and Conclusions: This preliminary study indicates that AAS consumers are feeling poorly represented in public health responses to substance use. AAS consumers are concerned regarding the state of ‘underground’ product available to them and are supportive of a drug testing service which considers their unique needs. The data suggest testing services provide presence and purity information which is provided through anonymous and confidential means. Integrated harm reduction through resources and peer-led frameworks are highly sought after among this consumer group.

Implications for Practice or Policy: