

Reimagining harm reduction for people who use anabolic-androgenic steroids through testing, community engagement, and peer-led care

Authors:

Timothy Piatkowski¹

¹Griffith University

Abstract:

This presentation brings together a series of innovative projects that advance harm reduction for people who use anabolic-androgenic steroids (AAS) through chemical testing, community feedback, and tailored health conversations. This, first-ever AAS testing trial, involved chemical analysis of AAS samples submitted by the AAS-using community to CheQpoint, Queensland, and the dissemination of results to the community. Analysis revealed several samples contained unanticipated substances, underscoring the risks posed by unregulated AAS markets. Community feedback, through interviews, highlighted the importance of reliable testing in decision-making around health enhancement behaviours. Building on these findings, we issued the world's first AAS community 'drug notice' regarding contamination in oxandrolone samples, reaching thousands of people through social media. The alert prompted valuable community engagement, emphasising the need for expanded testing services and further harm reduction efforts. Lastly, we developed a peer-led health conversation for health workers engaging with people who use AAS and attend health services to test their compounds. Through a series of interviews and focus groups, we co-produced a framework that addressed both physical and psychosocial risks, promoting safer usage and linkage to tailored support through 'steroid literacy' resourcing. These strategies extend beyond mitigating harm to promoting informed decision-making, improving healthcare access, and fostering an environment where people who use AAS are met with respect and understanding, not criminalisation. Rather than reinforcing punitive measures, these initiatives open the door to new ways of responding to AAS consumption, recognising the agency and lived-living experiences of people.