

# Who speaks for whom: understanding the representational claims made at the 2024 NSW Drug Summit

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## **Introduction:**

Central to processes of policy engagement is who gets represented and how. The 2024 NSW Drug Summit brought together a range of stakeholders to attempt to build consensus on approaches to drug use and harm. Invitation processes were opaque, and it is unclear how different approaches to representation impacted proceedings and perceptions of the success/failure of the summit.

## **Method/Approach:**

We conducted discourse analysis of drug summit documents and interviews with summit participants. We apply Seward's (2010) representational claim framework to assess how organisations and groups made representational claims at the drug summit.

## **Key Findings:**

There were multiple, nested representational claims made at the 2024 NSW Drug Summit. Structures such as the summit itself, processes, and report were claimed to represent engagement, transparency, and the content of the summit. Key issues were the lack of meaningful First Nations engagement; spaces for deliberation; trust in processes; and clarity in how the content and issues that emerged during the summit would be represented in the final report. Attendees were part of a dynamic process of claim-making, understanding their involvement to be representing their organisations, themselves, or a positionality (e.g. lived and living experience, prevention, research). Plenaries were seen to represent broader constituencies, views in the room, and also a partial, limited perspective.

## **Discussions and Conclusions:**

All attendees were involved in processes of claim-reception, assessing and contesting the structural and individual claims that were made. Structures, in particular, were problematised. While organisational representation was rarely contested on its own terms, the involvement of certain organisations and individuals were contested as offering only partial perspectives.

## **Implications for Policy:**

Summits as policymaking exercises premised on engagement of stakeholders should have transparent organisation and processes that include various organisations, groups, and individuals attentive to and structured by variable social perspectives in each.

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