

## **Learnings from a prison-based drug treatment program on planning for release: A qualitative study**

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**Introduction / Issues:** Prison-based drug and alcohol (D&A) group treatment programs operate in all Australian jurisdictions. As more than two-thirds of people in prison report substance use prior to incarceration, such programs are needed. There have been few published papers on the impact of attending group treatment programs in Australian prisons, and the research published to date has been predominantly quantitative. We will report the experiences of males in prison who completed and those who did not complete a group-based D&A program, to gain insight into their strategies for reducing harm from D&A post-release.

**Method:** Qualitative thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 12 males who completed or were about to complete and 10 males who discontinued a prison-based group D&A treatment program.

**Results:** Program completers were more likely to have well-developed plans to reduce D&A harms and maintain abstinence upon return to the community; these included creating healthier social networks. They also showed stronger insights into the factors that led to offending. Those who did not complete the D&A program appeared to rely on self-will as the main way to reduce D&A harms, with lower awareness of options for support services to reduce or stop D&A use.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Prison-based D&A program engagement was associated with useful understandings for the program completers. Controlled trials are needed to examine whether such differences are the result of participation and translate into improved outcomes after release.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Funding is needed for fuller evaluation of effectiveness and outcomes of prison-based AoD treatments for Aboriginal Australians

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