

## **The experiences of people who use drugs in the NSW Drug Summit: Lessons for participatory drug policy processes**

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(Paper is co-led)

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### **Introduction:**

The call for “nothing about us without us” and participation of people who use drugs in debates, policy and processes has long been acknowledged as critical for improving the relevance, legitimacy and effectiveness of drug policy. The 2024 NSW Drug Summit was a unique event that aimed to build consensus “on the way NSW deals with drug related harms” (NSW Government 2024) by bringing together diverse drug policy stakeholders including people with lived and living experience and drug user organisations. This presentation reports some initial findings from research aiming to investigate how people who use drugs experienced the Drug Summit, the adequacy of summit processes to facilitate participation and the effect of the summit and summit processes on people who use drugs.

**Method:** The research includes analysis of interviews with summit participants who identify as people with lived or living experience of drug use, summit transcripts and documents, and public documents published during and after the summit from drug user organisations. Our analysis draws on the 3 key features of deliberative democratic processes of inclusion, deliberation and consequences (outcomes) as outlined by Ritter, Lancaster and Diprose (2018).

**Key Findings:** While inclusion is critical to participation, by itself it is not enough. Summit processes within and political forces without, undermined the inclusion, safety and voice of people who use drugs. Despite challenges of the summit, people who use drugs demonstrated agency within and beyond summit boundaries, providing lessons for the types of engagement that are relevant and useful. Initial findings point to the ways in which policy processes have effect in constituting and delimiting policy subjects and logics and ultimately, the ways in which processes can be attuned to more participatory and transformative drug policy possibilities.

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