

ENHANCING ACCESS TO NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN BOORLOO: THE *HEALTHY BLOOD HEALTHY BODY* PROJECT

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Background:

Needle and syringe programs (NSPs) are a cost-effective public health strategy for reducing harms associated with injecting drug use (IDU). However, disparities in health outcomes remain. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience higher notification rates for HIV and newly acquired hepatitis C than the non-Aboriginal Australian population. Access to NSPs can be impeded by factors such as service availability, which may be exacerbated in the context of shame and stigma. Applying Indigenous knowledges for more culturally responsive services can enhance service delivery and engagement. Using a strengths-based approach, the *Healthy Blood Healthy Body* project sought to improve access to NSPs for Aboriginal peoples who inject drugs (PWID) in Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar, Boorloo (Perth).

Methods:

Healthy Blood Healthy Body utilised a participatory action research framework and co-design methodology. Strategy development and implementation was a collaborative endeavour over four years, guided by an Aboriginal Advisory Group and supported by a Co-Design Working Group including key sector stakeholders, NSP service users, and the wider community. Ethical approval was provided by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee and Curtin University.

Results:

Project findings will be presented: consumer feedback on what makes health services culturally safe; scoping review of strategies for increasing cultural safety in alcohol and other drug harm reduction settings, including NSPs; Educultural Toolkit to build NSP staff cultural capabilities; community education campaign to encourage safer drug use and increase NSP service awareness; implementation and evaluation of an incentives-based peer referral pilot program; and recommendations for increasing engagement of Aboriginal PWID with NSPs.

Conclusion:

Healthy Blood Healthy Body activities have the potential to be scaled up or adapted for regional areas or other jurisdictions. We anticipate that outcomes will contribute to more culturally responsive NSPs, ultimately increasing their utilisation and reducing IDU harm.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The *Healthy Blood Healthy Body* project was supported by funding from a Healthway Health Promotion Intervention Research Grant.