

The voices of the most affected, Working together to amplify

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Background:

In 2024 two peak organisations of viral hepatitis priority populations participated in a national process to identify human rights issues impacting sex workers, and incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and girls. Risk of incarceration and detention is a serious risk to the health and human rights of both groups, yet decarceration and community-led policy solutions were not immediately apparent in the process. These peaks had to find another way to address them.

Methods:

The peaks decided to embark on a journey to draft a joint shadow report to the United Nations Fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Australia, based on the human rights concerns raised by their member organisations and individual members over the immediate past 12 months. This included analysing common types of front-facing urgent concerns presented at the member organisations, campaigns, and individual and collective advocacy efforts over that time.

Results:

Three themes emerged from our practice: justice, police and prisons. Twenty four Australian government policies responsible for, or permitting torture, racial vilification, gender-based violence, sexual harassment and deaths in custody of the priority population were noted. In response to each, a community-led solution was proposed.

Conclusion:

This is the first time national peaks in so-called Australia representing sex workers and incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and girls have collaborated to research, document and submit together to a United Nations review. The lack of discussion about decarceration elsewhere created a reason for these priority populations to work together. In just a twelve month period there were vast commonalities discovered. The outcome was not just a submission—it is also a statement of intent, building a future where lives are not footnotes in policy documents, but the foundation of transformative, liberatory change.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Please include disclosure of interest statement in your abstract for any contributions received relevant to this work. Please see example below:

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