

Extending the efficacy of harm reduction frameworks for steroid users in Australia

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Introduction and Aims: Steroid use is an increasing public health concern in many countries. Australia, in particular, is facing a workforce that may have significant gaps in its knowledge for this unique group of people who inject drugs (PWIDs). This project attempted to give voice to the perspectives of steroid users and the workforce who comes into contact with them in around optimising harm reduction frameworks.

Method: Sixteen semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from Australia were conducted. Stakeholders comprised eight male steroid users and eight service providers who worked at services steroid users frequented. Five were harm reduction workers from needle service providers (NSPs) and three were general practitioners. Data were transcribed and analysed using a reflexive thematic lens.

Results: These exploratory data underscore the ways in which steroid users and service providers understand the present climate in which harm reduction for steroids operates in Australia. There were three overarching themes developed from the stakeholder perspectives – Steroid Safe Space, Therapeutic Barriers, and Linking Strategy.

Discussions and Conclusions: The data reveal a deeply entrenched and complex social dynamic which accompanies steroid use. Perspectives of the workforce in this sector, alongside the perspective of steroid users themselves, indicate flaws in the present framework. These data direct strategic linkage between NSPs and peers to leverage these face-to-face service sites, which currently represent an underutilised resource and are contextually relevant for peer-led programs. Nationally, more programs may consider establishing community engagement presence and building trust with steroid users through ongoing commitment to lived experience of all types of PWIDs.

Declaration of competing interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.