

WORKER WELLNESS AND RETENTION DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

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What is the topic and what are the objectives of the session?

People who work with people who use drugs are often frontline responders during crises, including outbreaks, pandemics, overdose and housing crises, wars, and much more. Burnout has become an urgent issue in the field. Retaining quality workers, especially those with lived and living experience, requires moving past telling people to practice self care. This session will share success stories of organizations across the United States who have implemented worker-centered policies to support people doing harm reduction work in the world's worst overdose crisis.

How will the session encourage debate and idea sharing:

INHSU attendees come from across the globe and are facing unique crises, from conflict to fascism to synthetic opioids to violence against sex workers. Discussion space attendees will be able to learn from each other on how they've coped with working in environments of crisis and trauma. They will also be able to evaluate their own programs and organizations and see what opportunities there are for implementing policies and practices that increase sustainability and resilience.

How will the session meet the aims of the conference / align with the conference themes?

Global and national crises are on the front of the minds of many INHSU attendees. While many of the sessions will rightfully be about cascades of care, attendees also need spaces to address the stress and burnout many are facing in the work. Relationship building is at the core of working with people who use drugs. Long term retention of workers allows trust to be established, improves care outcomes, and keeps vital historical knowledge in our field. It is also irresponsible to hire people with lived and living experience if we are not equipped to care for their needs experiencing both firsthand and vicarious trauma.

Speakers/Facilitators:

Sarah Whipple is a Co-Director of the Yuba Harm Reduction Collective, an organizer for the Sacramento Sex Workers Outreach Project, a board member of the Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness, and a Steering Committee Member of the California Syringe Exchange Programs Network. She has living experience with substance use and received a 2024 Jude Byrne Emerging Female Leader Award.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

I do not have any conflicts to disclose.

Note: I do not have a Microsoft Word subscription. I did my best to format the abstract as requested using the free software available to me, but I was disheartened to see that abstracts that do not conform to guidelines will be rejected. Community members who have a lot of value to add to this conference may not have the technical experience and equipment necessary to do this application. I hope my

application is still accepted and that future conferences include options for submission that are more accessible to community members.