Identifying concerns and collaborating for rapid response; preliminary findings from the formative evaluation of the Prompt Response Network

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Introduction: The Prompt Response Network (PRN) is an Australian network of stakeholders who monitor for and respond to drug-related public health concerns. Engaging 88 member organisations nationally, the PRN supports and facilitates intra- and inter-jurisdictional information exchange within a federal system of governance via routine meetings, a public facing website republishing public drug alerts and a private online community. A formative evaluation was conducted to explore the successes, limitations and future directions of the PRN.

Methods: Twenty key informants reporting prior engagement with the PRN and representing diversity across states and territories, organisations and expertise, participated in 90-minute semi-structured interviews. Interviews explored [i] jurisdictional processes associated with early warning, [ii] perceptions of, engagement with and impacts of the PRN [iii] future PRN priorities. Data were analysed inductively via a thematic framework methodology.

Results: The PRN's engagement of diverse stakeholders was said to have positively enhanced intra- and inter-jurisdictional relationships, cohesion and knowledge with positive impacts on the rapidity and reach of public drug alerts. However, barriers and tensions associated with PRN participation and information exchange were raised. These included the sometimes-competing priorities of network members who traversed public health, law enforcement, research and consumer organisations, the lack of governance frameworks for interjurisdictional data sharing and limited resourcing for drug-related early warning.

Discussions and Conclusions: As the first national network of its kind, the PRN was positively appraised for facilitating interjurisdictional relationships, transparency and trust and developing jurisdictional capacity for drug-related early warning.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Findings affirm the literature on drug-related early warning systems which emphasises the imperative of multidisciplinary, interagency and interjurisdictional networks to effective responses. In the context of ongoing acute drug-related public health concerns in Australia, the utility and legitimacy of national and subnational networks ought to be recognised via sustainable resourcing and supportive governance.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: