

Co-creating culturally safe drug checking with Indigenous Peoples who use illicit drugs: Insights from Canada for Australia

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Indigenous Peoples who use illicit drugs (IPWUID) are disproportionately affected by the drug poisoning crisis as a key feature of colonialism, experiencing elevated rates of drug poisoning death in both so-called Canada and Australia. Community-wide drug checking can address unpredictable and potentially lethal substances in unregulated drug markets, however strategies still need to be explored to increase accessible and equitable drug-checking services for IPWUID. While drug checking has been introduced in four jurisdictions across Australia, it has either been situated in music festival settings or in community-based fixed sites where suitability for IPWUID has not been assessed. So far, there have been no community-based drug checking sites in Australia situated in regional or remote communities, nor are there accessibly designed models, like distributed drug checking, that could reach these places. In this panel, nêhiyaw-Saulteaux Métis researcher from so-called Canada, currently working on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples of the Songhees Nation and Xwsepsəm Nation, and WSÁNEĆ peoples (Victoria, British Columbia), Jennifer Lavalley will present the context, purpose and methodological framework from an Indigenous-led, qualitative, and community-based project that aims to develop culturally safe drug checking technologies and services for IPWUID in collaboration with Indigenous harm reduction workers, peer workers, and other IPWUID to centre Indigenous knowledge systems, document best practices, and reduce barriers to access. Her project is guided by coastal Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous approaches to knowledge translation. Following Jennifer's presentation, Monica Barratt will chair a panel that includes Indigenous man and drugs educator, Kelvin Jarrett, Aboriginal Peer Outreach Specialist, Rebecca Riseley, and pharmacist and social researcher, Amber Domberelli, to talk about how we in Australia can begin to co-create our own culturally safe drug checking for our Indigenous communities. We will also discuss the issue of Indigenous data sovereignty in the context of drug checking services.