

# **Dismantling structural and systemic barriers to employment faced by the lived and living experience workforce in harm reduction**

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# Disclosure Statement

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None to declare

# Acknowledgement of Country

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# Community Acknowledgement

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# Harm Reduction Peer Workers

Harm Reduction Peer Workers are people with lived and living experience of drug use and overdose risk, who are employed in harm reduction roles that promote the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs.



# Systemic and structural issues

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## POLICY ENVIRONMENT

### **Macrolevel social environment:**

- Stigma towards PWUD
- Media propaganda

### **Macrolevel legal environment:**

- Drug use legality
- Punitive approaches

## ORGANISATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

### **Microlevel socio-legal environment:**

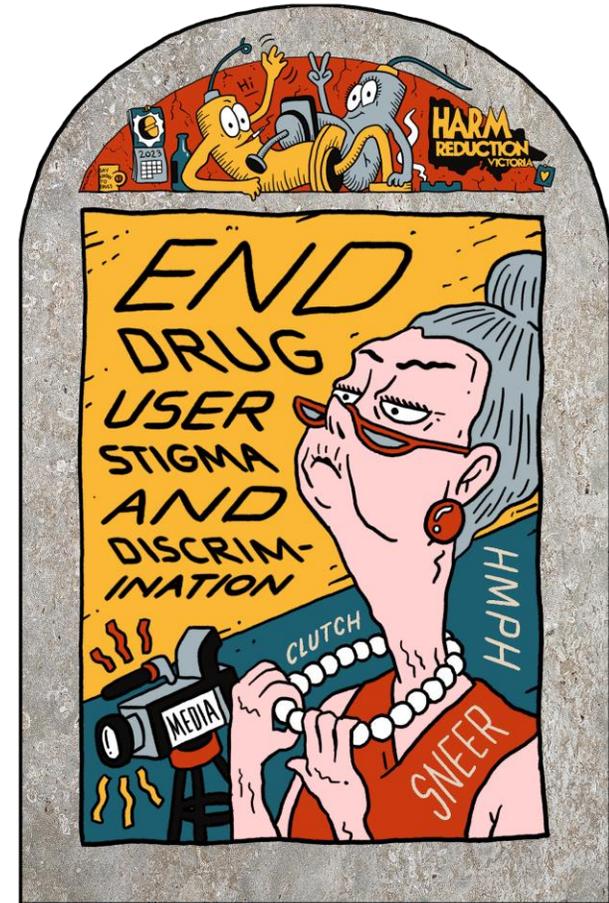
- No safety infrastructure
- No intra-organizational supports

### **Enabling at Macrolevel:**

- Industrial reforms for contracts and job stability
- Systemic reforms to address criminal record check barriers

# Drug use stigma and employment

The World Health Organisation has described people who use injectable drugs as some of the most stigmatised community on the basis of their health condition.



# Police Checks and WWCC in recruitment

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Organisations typically require all staff to hold a Working with Children Check to ensure they adhere to the Victorian Child Safe Standards

## Standard 6

- People working with children and young people *are suitable* and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.



# *The Worker Screening Act 2020*

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## 7 Child-related work

(2) For the purposes of this Act, work is not child-related work by reason only of occasional direct contact with children that is incidental to the work.

# FUSE INITIATIVES

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- Network of Practice
- Discipline-specific supervision
- Support interventions



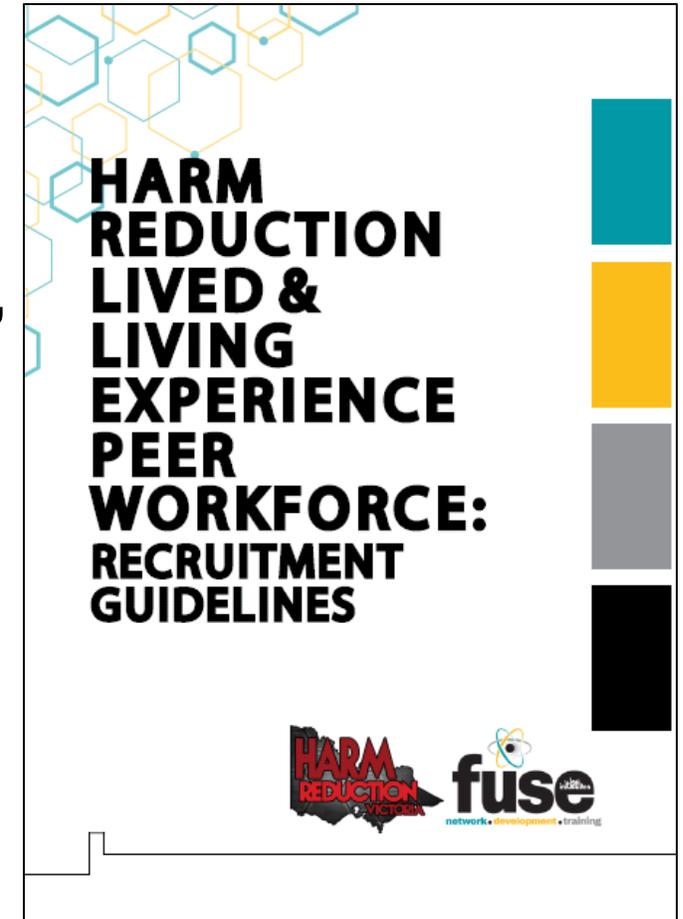
- HRPW Training
- Training for non-peer colleagues
- Organisational readiness training



- Harm Reduction Peer Workforce Strategy
- Discipline-Specific PD's and recruitment guidelines
- HRPW-friendly policies and procedures

# The way forward: Implications for practice

- HRPWs will have recourse to discrimination on the basis on criminal history.
- The sector with benefit from more HRPWs' expertise and connection to a criminalised community
- Service users will enjoy better health outcomes
- Services will be seen as more credible and acceptable to service users



# References

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- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2012). *On the Record: Guidelines for the prevention of discrimination in employment on the basis of criminal record*. Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/publications/human-rights-record>
- T. Piatkowski et al. (2025). Mapping the risk environment for peers with lived-living experience working in the alcohol and other drugs sector in Queensland. In *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 137, 2025, 10472. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2025.104725>
- Worker Screening Act 2020. [https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/consol\\_act/wsa2020190/](https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/consol_act/wsa2020190/)

# Thank you!

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See here for more information and resources!

## HRVic Mailing list sign up:



Website for Joining the HRVic Mailing List:  
<https://www.hrvic.org.au/membership>

## HRPW Discipline Specific Framework:



Link to HRPW Discipline Specific Framework on our website:  
[Harm Reduction Peer Workforce Discipline Specific Framework](#)