

Changes in Australians' Attitudes towards Supervised Injecting Facilities

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Introduction: Supervised injecting facilities (SIFs) have been shown to reduce the health and social harms experienced by people who inject drugs but are often subjected to intense public and media scrutiny. This paper aimed to explore population attitudes to SIFs and how these have changed over time in Australia.

Methods: Data were drawn from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), a national sample collecting data on illicit drug use and attitudes towards drug policy among Australians (2001-2019). Ordinal logistic regression assessed sociodemographic characteristics associated with different attitudes to SIFs and binary logistic regression assessed trends over time.

Results: In 2019, 77.0% of participants responded to the question on SIFs. Of these respondents, 54% (95%CI: 52.9, 55.1) supported SIFs, 27.5% (95%CI: 26.6, 28.4) opposed, and 18.4% (95%CI: 17.7, 19.2) were ambivalent. Support for SIFs correlated with having a university degree (OR=1.75; 95%CI: 1.58, 1.94), non-heterosexual identity (OR=1.81, 95%CI: 1.51, 2.17), and recent illicit drug use (OR=1.74, 95%CI: 1.55, 1.94). Respondents who were male or living in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas had lower odds of supporting SIFs (OR=0.92, 95%CI: 0.85, 1.00; OR=0.64-0.80, respectively). Between 2001-2019, the proportion of respondents that supported SIFs increased overall (3.3%), as did those who 'don't know' (7.4%), whilst opposition decreased (11.7%).

Conclusions: Opposition to SIFs has declined over the past 20 years, but a substantial minority of respondents are ambivalent or 'don't know enough to say'. Plain language information about SIFs and their potential benefits, targeted to those who are ambivalent/'don't know' may further increase public support.

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