

2024 APSAD Abstract submission

“Be Iconic, take care xoxo”: Building on strengths to support LGBTQ+ harm reduction at Mardi Gras 2024

Authors:

Georgina Bell¹, Micha Couell², Zekiel Morrison³

¹ Harm Reduction, ACON, NSW, Australia

² Harm Reduction, ACON, NSW, Australia

³ Harm Reduction, ACON, NSW, Australia

Presenter's email: Gbell@acon.org.au

Background: Local and national data show LGBTQ+ populations use drugs at higher rates than the general population and engage in specific drug use practices that produce nuanced risks /harms. LGBTQ+ communities also have a long history of creating safe spaces that embody cultures of care and prioritise peer to peer support. Going into Mardi Gras 2024 several risks were identified, including higher than usual temperatures, GHB drops, increase in polydrug use & increase in reported opioid adulterants in MDMA and methamphetamine.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: ACON delivered a targeted harm reduction campaign communicating pragmatic and evidence-based advice, focusing on existing cultures of care. “Take Care xoxo” communicated that whatever substances people choose to take, the most “iconic” thing to do is to *take care* of yourself /your community. By centring values LGBTQ+ communities practice, we delivered advice that is likely to have stronger resonance & uptake. The campaign’s featured 11 key messages delivered across printed and digital platforms at dozens of venues and events & were designed with bold colours, relevant aesthetic, and clear language.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: This campaign was a huge success with significant cost effectiveness, reaching 165,200± people across 3 weeks of promotion on ACON socials, with additional reach through organic promotion. Many reported learning strategies for the first time, particularly Naloxone, which received high interest. LGBTQ+ peer networks were essential to distribution, with volunteers taking the campaign into diverse venues/events, including private spaces where higher risk can be present, that ACON is not usually able to access.

Conclusion and Next Steps: The campaign received positive feedback, diverse reach, and coincided with Rover data from the MG season showing lower than usual drug presentations, and increased reports of crowd care. It increased safety across the season, ensuring that emerging risks are communicated in the right way, to the right people, building community capacity to take care of one another.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): This campaign demonstrated the importance of connecting with values and existing strengths including peer networks, in order to build safety

and prevent harms of illicit drug use. Future campaigns should consider a strengths-based approach and ensure messages are targeted and come from trusted partners.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *ACON received funding from NSW Health to produce this campaign, and built on messages in the NSW Health Stay OK campaign.*