

A public health approach to reducing methamphetamine harm in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction: Methamphetamine is a significant contributor to drug harm in Aotearoa New Zealand. Social and community damage are significant components of this harm, and this is experienced inequitably by Māori communities. We aim to identify programs and approaches that focus on reducing social and community harm, and those that incorporate Māori (indigenous) perspectives. Specifically, we aim to answer; what would a public health approach to methamphetamine look like in practice, in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Methods: We conducted a systematic search of recent systematic reviews related to reducing methamphetamine-related harms, and of recent studies pertaining to indigenous and select harm reduction approaches.

Results: Our initial search yielded 1301 de-duplicated records. 123 full-text records were assessed, resulting in 57 inclusions. Four additional records were included after supplementary searching. Only 6 studies related to indigenous approaches. Abstinence was the primary outcome measure in the majority of studies. However, harm reduction approaches (that do not have this primary aim) still lead to significant benefits for people who use methamphetamine, including reductions in use. This is an important knowledge gap in Aotearoa New Zealand, given that both treatment and education interventions have mixed findings on efficacy.

Discussions and Conclusions: The paucity of findings relating to indigenous approaches to methamphetamine harm reduction is a clear knowledge gap. Given the importance of culturally informed practice for cultural safety and treatment efficacy, future research endeavours for (and led by) indigenous people ought to be prioritised to reduce these inequities.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Little research was found that focussed on supporting others who are close to an individual who uses methamphetamine. Given the support that families provide within the context of substance harm, particularly among Indigenous populations, significantly more research and policy attention should be focused on enabling families and caregivers to support those who use methamphetamine.

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