

# The experiences of people who use drugs in the NSW Drug Summit: Lessons for participatory drugs policy processes

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## Acknowledgements and conflicts

This research was conducted on the lands of the Bidjigal and Gadigal people. First Nations sovereignty was never ceded and the impacts of colonialism are ongoing.

We thank the participants involved in this research for contributing their time, experiences, and reflections on what was a difficult government process, and at a difficult time of year.

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**Conflict declaration: members of the research team participated at the summit (plenaries, participants, observers).**

# Overview

- “Nothing about us without us”
- 2024 NSW Drug Summit as a participatory event
- Research Aims:
  - to investigate how people who use drugs experienced the Drug Summit,
  - the adequacy of summit processes to facilitate participation
  - and the effect of the summit and summit processes on people who use drugs.



Image: Sir David Martin Foundation

# Method & Analysis



16 x 'sentiment interviews' with attendees + transcript of Sydney drug summit (Dec 2024)



Deductive thematic analysis against areas of inclusion, deliberation, impacts and effects, power, agency and resistance



Initial findings of 3 core themes:

Democratic deliberation or political theatre?  
Deliberation and consensus process  
Power, agency and organisation

# Quick note on defining LLE

- Complex
- Representation and positionality linked to professional status (summit participation constituted people in particular ways)
- Limited and diminished view of LLE (but also likely does not capture full range of LLE at the summit)

# 1: Democratic deliberative process or political theatre?

*“So it kind of felt like there was, I felt like there was a bit of a narrative that they had already chosen, **and their minds had been made-up about certain things**” (Participant 14 LLE)*

*“I just don't understand why they might not have been a little bit more respectful towards participants, especially those people who use drugs who are putting themselves out there and putting their whole lives out there and saying we need this it, **it felt disrespectful to be backgrounding media behind the scenes at the same time**” (Participant 9: health worker)*



## 2: Deliberation and “consensus” process

“Pretty much everyone in the room was going, “This isn't what we said”. But then we were kind of told, we had to pick a top five to like bring it down and we did that but kind of begrudgingly... You're pushing us to choose things that don't reflect what we have actually said,” (Participant 14 – LLE)

*“And so I suppose, yeah, I was really gutted and disappointed by the end of day two. Like the plans were to go and have drinks. But I was like, no, I'm going home... I was like “no, I'm exhausted, I'm drained and I'm, you know, I'm ready to burst into tears. I just need to go and lay down” (Participant 14 – LLE)*

*“I was told by a person who was in another room that almost that exact same statement was said to them. So there was, you know, word got around very quickly within my community And, **we agreed that the first words out of our mouths on any table should be decriminalisation of personal possession and use.**”*  
(Participant 1 – LLE)

*“**What is really hitting me is the lack of trans representation here.** You know we disproportionately suffer. Well not suffer. **We don’t suffer.** We enjoy it, we enjoy the drugs you know”* (Summit plenary speaker - LLE)

*“I was pleased that it happened and **I think it made a really strong statement to the to the room** and to the to the, to people who are going to write the report. I really hope it's sort of taken into consideration when the report comes out”* (Participant 1: LLE)

## Finding 3: power, agency and organisation beyond the summit boundary



# Lessons for participatory drugs policy

- Need actual commitment to participatory and democratic processes
- Policy processes can have profound effects on participants
- Acting outside of the defined boundaries of policy processes can provide space for alternative participation, views, framing and solutions to emerge.