

Van West - Mobilising Harm Reduction services to adapt to changing population needs

Authors:

Scott Withy¹, Dean Rogut¹, Thileepan Naren^{1,2,3,4,5}, Andrea Fischer¹

cohealth, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia¹, Burnet Institute², Western Health, Melbourne, Australia³, Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia⁴, National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Melbourne, Australia⁵

Presenter's email: dean.rogut@cohealth.org.au

Background: Harm reduction (HR) services within the west of Melbourne have been well established for over 20 years, with a primary fixed-site NSP program operating continuously in the suburb of Footscray. However, with increased gentrification pushing service users to the outer suburbs, coupled with the emergence of local hotspots in Footscray and nearby suburbs, a novel approach was funded through the Victorian Statewide Action Plan.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: Van West has developed through listening to the community about what works. A mobile van, staffed by a HR worker and registered nurse, this service provides: health assessments, wound care, HR advice, NSP supplies and naloxone. The team also connects people to housing, alcohol and other drug services, and other health and social care services.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: The results of the intervention will be presented through a needs analysis of the gaps in service delivery across the west of Melbourne and an assessment of where future services are best located. This will involve key stakeholder engagement, interviews with service users (travel time, post code analysis) as well as data provided from Van West and cohealth's NSP site in Braybrook.

Conclusion and Next Steps: Mobile services are a cost-effective and agile way of servicing large geographical areas, providing services where they are required, to people disconnected from the health system. Mobile services can also play a role in supporting the broader community to understand and respond to public drug use.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: This intervention was a pragmatic response to the changing needs of people who use drugs. Mobile services are accepted by service users and can play a critical role in service provision. They provide an entry point to fixed-sites and adjacent services that allow for large geographical areas, and potentially specific population groups, to be serviced.

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