

REVIEWING HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN NSW PRISONS: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO REDUCE TRANSMISSION OF BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES AND SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS

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Background/Approach:

The sharing of unsterile injecting equipment and unprotected sex in prison continues to pose a risk of viral transmission between patients. The provision of condoms, dental dams, and disinfectant Fincol are the main harm reduction strategies for protection of patients in NSW prisons.

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network (the Network) receives feedback from staff and patients that in some NSW correctional centres patients are unable to access Fincol or condoms.

Analysis/Argument:

A joint, high-level Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) and Network Harm Reduction Reference Group agreed that a state-wide review of patient access to Fincol, condoms, dental dams and harm reduction educational material should be undertaken.

In October 2017, a checklist was designed and distributed to all CSNSW Governors of operational correctional centres. Of 35 correctional centres, 28 checklists were completed and returned (response rate of 80%).

Outcome/Results:

Whilst some gaps were identified, initial results indicate that Fincol was relatively accessible in the majority of centres. In contrast, access to condoms was inconsistent or inadequate at a number of centres across the state.

The review also compared results to best practice prison harm reduction guides and approaches employed in other jurisdictions. Areas that were identified as worthy of further investigation included:

- The establishment of more reliable information on the use of Fincol or consideration of an alternate disinfectant
- Best practice condom distribution models
- A mechanism for patients to quickly report access concerns
- An ongoing review and audit process

A Working Group will finalise a Report based on the review and ratify achievable recommendations.

Conclusions/Applications:

The review will provide recommendations that will strengthen harm reduction strategies in NSW prisons. Furthermore it is considered that the process undertaken and partnership approach is replicable across other custodial jurisdictions to facilitate review and improvement of harm reduction strategies and inform policy development.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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