

# **New and emerging methods for improving the healthcare of people who use drugs: Results and recommendations from a national consultation**

## **Authors**

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## **Introduction**

People who use drugs are often underserved by healthcare services and often have unmet health needs. Researchers and policymakers have begun experimenting with new and emerging data-driven methods, including machine learning, predictive risk modelling, and data linkage, to identify and contact people who use drugs to improve their health, social and economic outcomes. There is a need to examine the social, legal and ethical implications of these methods, their benefits and risks, and to consider whether alternative methods for improving outcomes for people who use drugs are available.

## **Methods**

This presentation draws on findings from a recent national consultation undertaken with key experts including health professionals, policymakers, legal specialists, artificial intelligence (AI) experts, and consumer and peer advocates (N = 13). Semi-structured interviews were conducted exploring the benefits and risks of new and emerging methods for addressing healthcare needs, and future research priorities.

## **Key findings**

Experts emphasised the importance of developing systems that are flexible and responsive to evolving health needs, while safeguarding stigmatised communities. We identify areas that warrant further research, including in relation to stigma, data sovereignty, legalities, human rights issues, accountability mechanisms, and the acceptability of such methods among people who use drugs themselves. People with experience of drug use (and related concerns such as hepatitis C) must play a central role in establishing research priorities; conducting research into new and emerging methods; and implementing, evaluating and monitoring them.

## **Conclusions**

There is an urgent need to examine these various methods and technological developments, across settings and contexts – from research to policy and practice, in administrative, clinical, and population data– to understand how data-driven methods are shaping knowledge and practice, and the attendant benefits and risks to rights and integrity of people who use drugs.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement**

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