

Youth-led advocacy for drug policy reform: Harnessing community voices through the #BeHeardNotHarmed campaign

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Background: Young adults are the largest demographic of people who use drugs, and the most likely to want drug policy reform, yet they are the least likely to be involved in decision-making for policy which affects them. #BeHeardNotHarmed is a youth-led campaign for pill testing and drug law reform, focussed on elevating the voices of young adults whose leisure spaces are systemically targeted and policed.

Description of Intervention: In December 2022, the #BeHeardNotHarmed Survey was launched, alongside an Anonymous Drug Story Platform to share lived experiences of the impacts of drug policy. The survey addressed gaps in literature around preferences for policy reform and harm reduction services. The survey was co-designed with young adults, peers, students, and AOD professionals, and peer-reviewed to ensure ethical practice while retaining community ownership and leadership. Community-led action-oriented approaches were maintained through evidence-making and translating, including through youth- and student-led community workshops, analysis, and output generation.

Implementation: The campaign involves ongoing mobilisation and elevation of the voices of young adults to drive policy change. Through ongoing consultation and knowledge-translation, we collaborate with community organisations and stakeholders to inform coordinated advocacy. Based on community preferences, a key follow-up initiative involves coordinating the implementation of harm reduction education and reagent kit access at universities across Australia.

Conclusion and Next Steps: The #BeHeardNotHarmed survey facilitated data-exchange and ongoing community-led advocacy to activate and mobilise young adults. Young adults have extensive experience and deserve a platform and appropriate support to drive meaningful drug policy reform: by community, for community.

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