

Learning from the COVID-19 Experience – Improved
pandemic preparedness to prevent against level health
and HCV risk among People Who Use Drug (PWUD) in
Australia

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Introductions and Acknowledgements

- Who am I, and what am I speaking about?
- Acknowledgements

Pandemic Preparedness Project snapshot

- Aim and objectives – to capture and document peer and DUO experiences and personal and system level impacts of their COVID-19 experience, and identify recommendations for improved pandemic/disaster preparedness – with a view to mitigating unnecessary exacerbation of health and manifold other wellbeing risks, including HCV and other blood borne viruses (BBVs).
- Approach – 3 x project stages, comprising initial consultation and engagement, main data collection stage, and thematic analysis to illicit outcomes and recommendations for future pandemic preparedness
 - Nation-wide engagement to AIVL DUO state/territory Members to participate in the provider-level interviews, and engage, recruit and interview peers in their jurisdiction who were using drugs during the pandemic.
 - Capped payment amount provided to participating DUO peaks toward their project coordination and data collection support.
 - Data collection hinged on combined input of participating DUO sites and their respective client cohorts. Information sheets and Interview outlines were developed for peers and DUO workers, to achieve informed consent, and aimed at capturing personal and service level experiences and arising impacts, and subsequent recommendations for future pandemic/disaster preparedness.

Summary of headline personal and service/system experiences and impacts arising – and relationship to elevated health and HCV risks

- Broad categories of personal experiences and impacts:
 - Mental health, social isolation, loneliness and increased vulnerability and visibility on the streets
 - Diminished drug supply, quality and soaring prices – coupled with reduced cash availability
 - In some areas, diminished equipment access and disposal options
 - Reduced wrap-around and complete service options
 - Elevated housing and domestic violence
 - Increased unemployment and financial insecurity
- Broad categories of service/system level experiences and impacts:
 - Adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness to latest policy and practice (inc. OH&S) changes, were the key factors that helped DUOs to be able to keep doors open and core harm reduction and NSP services available
 - More in house management and workforce meetings and maintenance of vital internal communication lines across the org and partners, and to all levels of government to remain in step with latest announcements and changes
 - Planning and managing with limited and finite equipment and resources – whilst trying to keep up with rising levels of community needs
 - Targeted workforce development to specifically build skills supporting peer roles in disaster responsiveness
 - Challenges expediting naloxone rollout during its trial stages
- Relationship to elevated health and HCV risks and need, use and value of improved preparedness measures

Real world implications of recommendations for pandemic/disaster preparedness

- Summary of recommendations categories/themes:
 - Expect and plan for service demands and equipment needs to rise
 - PWUD need to be included and consulted at every step and stage in the response cycle (planning, design, rollout, monitoring)
 - We need peer-based DUO leadership and active presence in *Every* state and territory, and ideally, region.
 - Peers are best places to deliver peer services. We need to not only continuously grow and diversify our peer workforce, but invest in frontline training that specifically prepares workers for pandemic/disaster type scenarios.
 - Maintain effective internal communications and regular workforce meetings between and across all organisation and staff levels, so that everyone knows their role and how they contribute to the entire 'team' and service' – under any operating circumstance that may arise
 - There is always a priority on providing safe, flexible and complete wrap-around services.
 - A human rights approach where no one gets left behind should always be applied.
 - Sufficient and sustainable funding is needed for truly effective and impactful service responses.
 - There is an onus on all levels of government to plan for the future and allocate funds for emergency response purposes.
 - Explore models safe space and drop in models as a response to the ongoing housing crises
 - Continually develop our own data collection and surveillance capacities to document, report on, respond to and monitor the needs and outcomes of our community, including outcomes and impacts of our own sector's service response initiatives.
- Real world implications for improved pandemic preparedness, by:
 - Peers and DUOs
 - Other frontline services
 - Government