

Solutions Not Stigma: Community-Driven Evidence for Drug Policy Reform in Australia

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Introduction: Despite growing calls for drug reform, those most affected by drug policies (communities and those working on the harm reduction frontlines) are rarely centred in decision-making. The Solutions Not Stigma project disrupts dominant policy narratives by foregrounding lived/living and AOD sector experience as a primary source of knowledge, and by providing robust, community-driven data on attitudes towards reform.

Method: This national survey examined attitudes toward drug reform among 1,167 respondents, including people who use drugs, families, those working in AOD/harm reduction sectors, and young people. The survey was co-designed and implemented by peer and community organisations.

Key Findings: Overall, we observed overwhelming support across 23 areas of drug policy reform, with several key differences across respondent groups. Attitudes towards these reforms were consistently aligned with, and in many areas more progressive than, national public opinion data. Collectively, respondents strongly opposed the current over-investment in law enforcement and criminalising responses and called for a greater investment in harm reduction.

Discussions and Conclusions: This study affirms a growing consensus in favour of evidence-informed, rights-based reform. It challenges policy inertia by demonstrating that community-driven research not only reflects but often leads broader social attitudes on drug policy.

Implications for Practice or Policy: We suggest that governments must meaningfully engage with community-driven evidence to enact urgent reforms. This includes taking deliberate steps towards decriminalising drug use, expanding harm reduction, and reinvesting funding from ideological policies towards person-centred, evidence-based approaches. Solutions, not stigma, must guide Australia's drug policy future.

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