

Online resource to empower Indigenous communities to reduce harmful substance use

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience disproportionate levels of harm from alcohol and other drug use compared with other Australians. Minimising alcohol and drug related harm among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and using the Internet to provide evidence based information are identified as priorities in the *National Drug Strategy 2010–2015*.

This presentation highlights how people working to reduce the harms of alcohol and other drug use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be supported through an online resource. A specifically designed resource providing culturally appropriate and evidence based information can strengthen drug and alcohol initiatives at a community level.

Development of the online community resource (community portal) began with the engagement of community members through collaborative partnerships. Data was collected from a national online survey and four focus groups (in NSW, SA and WA), to ascertain the information needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members about alcohol and other drugs. Participants provided information on: the main substance use issues in their community; where they accessed information about alcohol and other drugs; what issues were important; and what type of information and resources would be useful to them and their community for an online resource.

Participants indicated that:

- all drugs were of concern but the biggest problems were harms related to alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis use
- the use of emerging drugs like ice (methamphetamine) and the misuse of prescription drugs (pharmaceuticals), and sniffing of volatile substances was an issue for some communities
- accessing appropriate and evidence based information about alcohol and other drugs was important
- young people (young men, women and families) and families impacted by alcohol and other drugs needed the most support.

Participants wanted information on:

- different drug types, where to go for help, and treatment options
- mental health and substance use, alcohol and pregnancy, and youth-specific issues.

Strong themes emerged of what to include on the Community portal including a focus on successful stories and programs and the use of community role models. Information presented with clear messages using visual and audio mediums was also requested.

There was strong support for providing fact sheets in plain language format, listings for services and organisations and the development of an app.

The community portal was developed with continuous feedback. It provides a synthesis of knowledge to help empower community members to reduce the harms arising from substance use.