

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED: Tuesday 10 November 2015, 12.01am AEDT

Injecting drug use a critical and emerging issue for Aboriginal communities

There is evidence and growing concern about a rise in injecting drug use and related harm within Aboriginal communities, including in more remote areas of Australia, according to research being presented at the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD) Conference in Perth today (Tuesday 10 November).

According to Associate Professor James Ward from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) in Adelaide, there is evidence to suggest the way in which Aboriginal people use illicit drugs has changed over the last two decades.

A/Professor Ward said that the proportion of Aboriginal people accessing needle syringe programs has increased from 5 per cent of the total in 1995 to 14 per cent in 2014, and the rate of hepatitis C is now three times that of non-Aboriginal Australians.

A/Professor Ward said it is particularly concerning that around 16 per cent of new HIV cases among Aboriginal people are due to injecting drug use compared with 3 per cent in non-Aboriginal Australians.

“Also of concern is the apparent increase in the use of methamphetamine or ice among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with two recent studies confirming ice as the most commonly used drug while injecting,” said A/Professor Ward.

A/Professor Ward’s research has explored similar issues in Indigenous populations across the globe, and studied models of care that are specific to these populations.

“Indigenous populations worldwide are at increased risk of alcohol and other drug problems. Through studying these populations we have an idea of what strategies may work to address injecting drug use in Aboriginal Australian communities,” said A/Professor Ward.

A/Professor Ward said that strategies that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their development are most likely to work.

“Much of the focus of harm reduction programs in Aboriginal communities has been on alcohol and cannabis use, but there is now a pressing need to focus on injecting drug use as well,” said A/Professor Ward.

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“In particular, reducing rates of sharing injecting equipment with extended family members, with whom Aboriginal people are more likely to reside, is critical to reducing the risks of passing on HIV and hepatitis C,” A/Professor Ward said.

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Naloxone in Scotland, A national approach

[Ann Roche](#), Director, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA)
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[Michael Wright](#), National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University
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[Jan Robertson](#), Centre for Research Excellence in the Prevention of Chronic Conditions in Rural and Remote Populations, James Cook University
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[Amy Peacock](#), University of Tasmania (2015 APSAD Early Career Award winner keynote)
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