

DO YOU FEEL SHAME?

A project on injecting drug use in the Victorian Aboriginal community.

VACCHO and Anex travelled around Victoria to learn more about injecting drug use and HIV risk in the Aboriginal community. We spoke with 69 Aboriginal people who inject drugs about their injecting practices, sexual health, and use of health services. Many spoke to us about the shame, isolation and stigma they experience as a result of their drug use. Here is a little of what they had to say...

Aboriginal people who inject drugs often feel embarrassed and uncomfortable visiting health services for injecting equipment because they fear being labelled as an injecting drug user, opting instead to go to pharmacies and hospital emergency departments.

"I was embarrassed at first getting them [needles], even would prefer someone else to go in and get them, because you don't want the workers to recognise your face, or to point the finger at you, 'that person is a user'..."

"I just normally go to a chemist I don't really go to needle exchange places where I get seen"

Those who live in regional areas are particularly reluctant to visit services, because they are worried about the stigma they may experience as a result of being identified as an injecting drug user in a small community.

Aboriginal people who inject drugs also rely on their friends who have 'no shame' to pick up equipment from health services for them.

"One of my mates, he had no shame... he would go to the needle exchange and get like big boxes of fifties and stuff, so... we all got to share"

This project has shown that there is a lot of shame associated with injecting drug use in the Aboriginal community and a reluctance to talk about injecting drug use as a health issue. If we don't discuss and treat injecting drug use as a public health priority, then the health of Aboriginal people who inject drugs will suffer and the shame and stigma will continue. Let's move forward together to engage Aboriginal people who inject drugs and promote safe injecting and harm reduction strategies within our services.

What your service can do to reduce shame and stigma

- Think about setting up a needle and syringe program (NSP) at your service as it could send a positive message that you care about Aboriginal people who inject drugs.
- If you are already a NSP allow clients to collect sterile injecting equipment in bulk so they can distribute to their peers.
- Look for ways to engage better with Aboriginal clients who inject drugs and don't judge them.
- Provide art classes and other activities and events, such as BBQs, for Aboriginal people who inject drugs.
- Promote safe injecting during community events such as NAIDOC week.
- Provide culturally relevant drug and safe injecting information at your service.
- Think about building partnership with your local mainstream NSP or Aboriginal health service.

Yiaga ba wadamba

(Wurundjeri Language)
the Find and Renew Projects

This research is part of the Yiaga ba wadamba (Find and Renew) Project, conducted by VACCHO in partnership with Anex. For further information about the project contact VACCHO at 5-7 Smith Street Fitzroy Vic 3065. Ph 03 9419 3350 or visit our website www.vaccho.org.au