

INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY

Healthier Approaches

ENGAGING ABORIGINAL CLIENTS WHO INJECT ICE

Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) are at the frontline of supporting Aboriginal people to access health and harm reduction services in a confidential and non-judgemental manner.

NSPs are safe places for clients, where in addition to obtaining sterile injecting equipment, they can access:

- Information on the health risks associated with injecting.
- Advice on safe injecting practices to reduce the risk of blood-borne virus transmission including HIV and hepatitis C.
- Safe disposal advice and equipment.
- Referral to other health and welfare services.

The term Aboriginal is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry

Background

Some Aboriginal people have low levels of trust and confidence in health and community services. It may be difficult for them to access Aboriginal-specific services due to shame, or concerns that their drug use may be revealed to members of their family or community. They may also be reluctant to access mainstream services because of the potential, or fear, of experiencing discrimination.

It is essential to ensure that the centres where NSPs operate are welcoming and culturally safe places for Aboriginal peoples. Cultural safety is about providing quality health care that fits within the familiar cultural values and norms of the person accessing the service that may differ from your own and/or the dominant culture. VACCHO's cultural safety training is available and can be tailored to meet the needs of your organisation and staff.

Key elements in supporting Aboriginal clients

Respect

All NSP clients develop confidence in the service when they feel respected, valued and that they are not being judged. When clients are treated respectfully they are more likely to feel open about discussing their health concerns.

A genuine approach

Direct and intrusive questioning can make clients feel nervous and shamed. This can especially be the case when working with Aboriginal clients who are likely to find the direct approach disrespectful, particularly if there is no existing relationship.

Building rapport

Establishing a rapport with clients takes time. It is important to be genuine and sincere, without being intrusive. Being welcoming, friendly and professional will reassure clients that you and your service take their privacy and health concerns seriously. All NSPs should be safe places for clients to visit.

Working from a holistic health model

Research has confirmed that mainstream harm reduction strategies are not always transferrable to Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal health should be approached holistically, taking into account the complete spiritual, emotional, cultural, physical and social wellbeing of the Aboriginal person.

In smaller communities NSPs are well placed to support Aboriginal communities to access mainstream services.

Here are some ways in how you and your organisation could improve your engagement:

- Display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags at the entrance of your service.
- Display posters and artwork that acknowledges the Country and its peoples and their elders.
- Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and celebrate NAIDOC week with your local Aboriginal community.
- Get to know what Sorry Business means to Aboriginal communities, and be supportive in accommodating and adapting your expectations.

Confidentiality

Building trust is a key component of the work and interactions between NSP workers and clients. It is important to emphasise to clients that all information is treated confidentially.

Being inclusive and mindful of the person's connection to family is very important when working with Aboriginal clients. The NSP client may be attending a mainstream service to reduce the chances of shaming their family due to their substance use. Reassurance of their confidentiality is paramount.

Signage should remind clients that their confidentiality is extremely important. This is particularly relevant in regional areas or where Aboriginal clients are likely to access the NSP service. You can access signage from www.penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry.

Summary

The NSP service is an essential part of Australia's health system. Every occasion of service is an opportunity to promote a welcoming, trusting, and supportive environment.

NSP workers can build confidence that they provide safe and confidential NSP services if they are aware of the negative past experiences many Aboriginal clients have had in relation to health and community services. Provide adequate time for engagement, be regular and consistent with your contact and give time to build relationships and rapport.

NSP workers can promote safer injecting messages in Aboriginal communities by increasing distribution of sterile injecting equipment.

Please consider contacting your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation for additional services and supports for your Aboriginal clients, or visit www.vaccho.org.au.

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