

INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY Healthier Approaches

THE IMPACT OF ICE USE ON ABORIGINAL FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Ice is having a significant impact on individuals and families within Aboriginal communities. Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) workers need to understand the effects of ice, how it impacts the individual, and be proactive in supporting the health and wellbeing of clients.

In Aboriginal communities, ice use can have significant effects on immediate and extended family members - at financial, social and emotional levels.

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

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Background

Ice use is a hot issue in Australia. While the impact should not be understated, an environment of fear does not support the health and wellbeing of NSP clients.

The use of ice and other illicit stimulants is not limited to Australia. It is a global issue, where illicit amphetamine-type stimulants have become the second-most widely used drugs after cannabis.

The impact on family and community

Extended family members within the community often take on the role of carers for the children and young people of parents who are substance affected or dependent. In this situation, the people who are caring for others may be reluctant to seek supports either from Aboriginal and/or mainstream services due to the importance of respecting the community and not bringing shame to the family.

Poor health outcomes for Aboriginal communities are well documented. Poor access to prevention and treatment services play a significant role, especially in areas of blood-borne virus, nutrition, oral health and poor overall health.

Key elements in working with Aboriginal clients

Stigma, shame and anonymity are key factors for Aboriginal peoples using and injecting ice.

Aboriginal individuals and families tend to live in relatively small and close-knit communities either in metropolitan or regional settings. This makes the issues of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity significant factors.

Some of the implications associated with the stigma and shame of using and injecting ice amongst Aboriginal communities may include:

- Relying on friends and acquaintances to obtain sterile injecting equipment.
- Avoiding Aboriginal specific NSP supports out of fear of being identified by family and community members.
- Avoiding mainstream NSP services to due to fear of stigma and discrimination.
- Aboriginal families with young children under their care avoiding NSP services out of fear of intervention by welfare services.

Strategies to support Aboriginal clients

- Ensure that all clients are aware of the strict requirement of respecting and conserving confidentiality.
- As you get to know the clients, make available resources to support their broader family.
- Ask your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service or Aboriginal Health Worker about the services available in the community, and to guide you on how to best support the client.
- Be aware of any programs that promote knowledge and understanding about the effects that ice can have on the person's physical and emotional health.

Summary

Understanding what's happening with drug use in your local area can also help you frame your approach and interactions with individuals - including opportunities for support and engagement. This is very important when working with Aboriginal clients who may already be experiencing isolation and discrimination due to their drug use.

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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