

**AIVL**Australian Injecting &
Illicit Drug Users League

AUSTRALIAN **STIGMA** CONFERENCE

The 'Line up'

Australian Parliament House,
Canberra

17.11.2022

The Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) was first incorporated as an association in 1992. This is a historic milestone and celebrates 30 years of an organisation that was one of the National leaders in the response to the HIV epidemic in Australia.

30 years on, we are still here fighting for the health and human rights of people who use and inject drugs. One of the most stigmatised groups of people in Australia.

The inaugural Australian Stigma Conference is held this year on the 17th of November, in the Great Hall at the Australian Parliament House. The forum-style conference will bring together policymakers, healthcare professionals and people who use drugs to engage in dialogue and hear about how stigma impacts people who use drugs. The 2019 Australian Drug household survey confirmed that around 43% of Australians over the age of 14 are willing to admit to illicit drug use at some point in their lifetime, indicating that stigma and drug use continues to have some type of impact on almost half of Australia's adult population.

The Stigma conference will present issues including the impact of stigma on illicit drug overdoses in Australia, stigma impeding Australia's 2030 Hep C elimination goals, stigma and language, stigma and people's experiences with pharmacotherapy and stigma undermining harm reduction more broadly.

Stigma & Overdose: The perspectives of drug user activists from Vancouver

Thursday | 17 November, 2022

Eris Nyx & Jeremy Kalicum

Eris Nyx and Jeremy Kalicum, founders of the Drug User Liberation Front (DULF) are travelling from Vancouver, Canada, a location where we see some of the highest rates of illicit drug overdose deaths in the world. DULF, a grass-roots organisation founded by the pair focuses on the safe supply of drugs to the community to prevent drug overdoses when public policy was inadequate and ineffective in reducing drug-overdose related death and harm.

Eris & Jeremy have spent years engaging in civil disobedience with great personal risk in a plight to save lives. The pair have worked tirelessly in the face of stigma and adversity, making no excuses for the controversial and important work that they do to reduce death and keep their community safe. We welcome them to the inaugural Australian Stigma Conference to talk about their own work, and also shine a light on how significant an overdose epidemic can get with an inadequate public health response.

Australia currently sees about 1700 people die annually from illicit drug overdoses. These numbers have been unacceptably consistent for some years. We have seen for decades that Australian drug trends loosely follow those of North America and Canada, and with the emergence of drugs like fentanyl already on our shores, it's time for us to learn from Eris & Jeremy and the essential work of DULF.

The format of Eris and Jeremy's session will be a 45-minute presentation on their work, safe supply and stigma, followed by a 30-minute Q&A with Australia's top stigma academic, Professor Carla Treloar of the University of New South Wales.

Professor Carla Treloar in conversation with Eris Nyx and Jeremy Kalicum

Professor Carla Treloar

Renowned expert on social research on stigma, Professor Carla Treloar will interview Eris & Jeremy about their experiences with the barriers of stigma when advocating for adequate public health policy to address the overdose epidemic in Vancouver. In this session, Prof Treloar will explore some parallels with the Australian context and get Eris & Jeremy's perspectives on strategies to draw attention to key issues of drug use, policy and stigma for impact and action.

Stigma and people's journeys with Opioid Pharmacotherapy: Talking with a panel of experts

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Dr Annie Madden AO, and a panel of experts

Dr Annie Madden AO, veteran Harm reduction Advocate, Executive Director of Harm Reduction Australia and inaugural CEO of AIVL will provide a presentation about some of the key issues impacting people receiving opioid pharmacotherapy. This will be followed by a panel session made up of peer experts, experts in 'addiction medicine' and drug and alcohol policy where issues will be explored such as: how stigma plays a part in systemic policy issues relating to opioid pharmacotherapy, and how stigma continues to be a barrier in allowing for opioid pharmacotherapy to reach its potential in the public health response to both blood-borne viruses and other drug-related harms such as overdose.

Details of the panellists participating in this session with Annie will be released in due course, though you can expect to see a collection of peer experts who are keen to share their stories about being on pharmacotherapy programs, an 'addiction medicine' specialist, a renowned policy maker, and a member of parliament.

Stigma and Drug Law Reform, why criminalisation is both impractical and increases drug-related harms: a discussion by two law enforcement veterans

Mick Palmer & Greg Denham

Former Australian Federal Policy Commissioner, Mick Palmer, and Greg Denham from Australia's chapter of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) talk about the harms of drug criminalisation. Illicit drug laws have, for over 100 years, failed to prevent drug harms. Despite massive resources allocated to law enforcement and prohibition, drugs are now cheaper, purer and more accessible. It's time to change the policy approach and narratives that drive prohibition which leads to thousands being criminalised each year. For far too long we have been seemingly mesmerised by the symptoms of illicit drug use while giving relatively scant regard to the causes. If we are to reduce the rate of incarceration, increase the rate of rehabilitation, have a heavier focus on harm reduction, AND make a positive impact on drug-related harms, we must make a serious commitment to addressing the many underlying causes of drug use. Which so often include: homelessness, family violence and other social disadvantages, mental illness and racial discrimination.

Instead of continuing to kick people when they are down, we have to find ways to help them stand up.

Stigma undermining the elimination of Hepatitis C

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Dr Kate Seear

In this session, Dr Kate Seear explores the links between injecting drug use, hepatitis C, stigma and Australia's goal to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030.

Kate is an Associate Professor at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University and a practising lawyer. She has written extensively on injecting drug use and hepatitis C-related stigma and discrimination, human rights and drug law. With Suzanne Fraser, she was the author of the world's first full-length social science book about hepatitis C (*Making disease, making citizens: The politics of hepatitis C*) and she currently leads a major Australian project on hepatitis C, stigma, discrimination and post-cure life.

In this session, Kate will consider the advent of highly tolerable and effective treatments for hepatitis C, and the optimism that is associated with the cure. She will then consider the role of other forces beyond medicine, such as law and policy, that continue to generate stigma for hepatitis C, and what such stigma means for elimination, particularly for people in prison.

Deconstructing the language that stigmatises and discriminates against people who use drugs

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Dr Marianne Jauncey & MJ Stowe

In this conversation about the relationship between stigma and language, Dr Marianne Jauncey and MJ Stowe discuss why words matter and how the way words are used can directly affect people who use drugs.

Dr Marianne Jauncey (another MJ!) is the Director at the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in Kings Cross, the first facility of its kind in Australia. Marianne has decades of experience in the public health arena, working with and alongside people who inject drugs. She has been integral in the work Uniting does at MSIC, most recently launching their Fair Treatment campaign which actively advocates for drug law reform in NSW and ACT.

MJ is an activist and academic from Cape Town, South Africa, where he worked as a Programme Coordinator at the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs (SANPUD) and held a research position at the University of Pretoria's Community Orientated Substance Use Programme (COSUP). He is currently a PhD candidate at the Kirby Institute, working at the intersection of on-the-ground realities and academia, co-developing and co-implementing healthcare and harm reduction interventions with and for people who use drugs.

This dynamic duo has experienced the power of language in relation to stigma – albeit from very different perspectives. This power is double-edged though, in that it also gives us the means to reduce stigma, address racial and social injustices, facilitate access to healthcare and promote better outcomes for all in our community.

Marianne and MJ will be 'bouncing off' each other in this session, talking about the power of aligning health professionals and peer specialists, the impact of changing our language, and how best to challenge stigma and promote better outcomes for our community.



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Final program schedule will be announced in coming weeks

www.aivl.org.au/events

