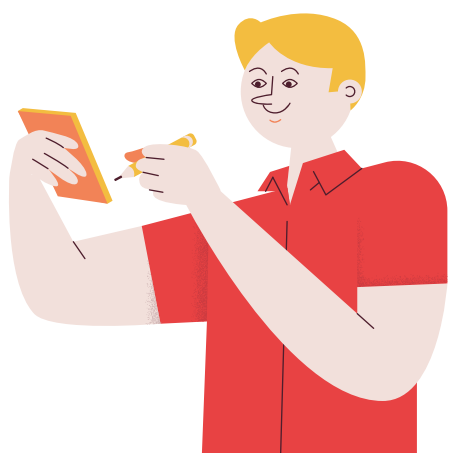


Operating Harm Reduction Services for Young People

Recommendations for harm reduction service providers who are willing to engage with and provide services to young people who inject drugs. The recommendations concern program's staffing, space, service, and activities delivered to youth, networking with other services, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, and general principles of work.

Staff



1. Hire young people who inject drugs as staff

Invest in current clients and create a walkable pathway for them to become staff. Peers can help access and build trust with clients, besides increasing the active participation of young people who inject drugs in care. They understand the language the needs and are the experts on reaching better and involving their peers. Hiring young people who inject drugs as staff can also further develop their skills and self-reliance.



2. Provide staff with necessary support and training

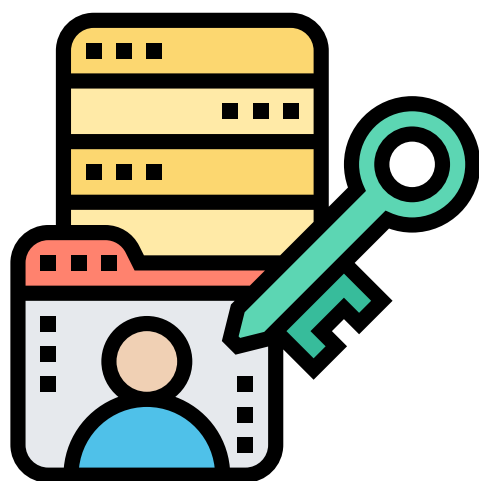
Whether they are peers or not, staff working with youth must be trained to be non-judgmental, know how to communicate, handle the (psychological) challenges of the work, and be attuned to the needs of the specific young population they assist. This will be reflected in the services they offer, the trust they can establish with clients, as well as their satisfaction at work.

Space



3. Engage youth in developing the space

Involving young people who inject drugs in planning and decorating the space will increase the chances of recognizing the service as appealing, comfortable, safe, welcoming, and providing for their needs. Youth should also be engaged in discussing and deciding about any needed rules to frequent the space. If the area is online, engage young people who inject drugs in choosing the proper channels, language, and imagery.



4. Guarantee privacy and confidentiality

When dealing with drug use and sexual or mental health, assuring privacy and secrecy is important. Designate separate facilities or a protected environment for counseling and testing to ensure the confidentiality and safety of young clients. The more privacy that can be factored into the space, services, and overall approach, the more likely the young people will feel secure enough to open up.

Services & Activities



5. Provide youth-specific services

There are essential differences between young people who inject drugs and their older counterparts, including different habits and preferences around drug use, different networks, and needs related to different life development phases. The more youth-specific the service or activity is, the easier it will cater to youths' needs.



6. Reach young people who inject drugs where they are

When starting a program, an activity, or assisting a new group, it is easier to reach young people who inject drugs in places where they already frequent than to expect them to reach a new space. Spaces can be schools, youth centres; saunas for LGBTIQ youth; online platforms; street-based hot spots for drug use; spaces of sex work, etc.



7. Provide young people who inject drugs with a comprehensive package of services

Youths have complex needs that have to be first assessed by service providers to offer the right package. Services may include HIV, HCV and STIs prevention, testing and treatment, SRHR care, prevention and management of overdose, management of clandestine abortion and gender violence, drop-in centres, NSPs, mental health support, legal support, shelters, and education on safer forms of drug use and injection, both via outreach work, mobile units or dedicated centres. Youths in more socio-economically vulnerable conditions may also need support for nutrition, hygiene, housing, education, and income generation activities.



8. Provide evidence-based, judgment-free, and appealing information

Provide youth with honest and clear information on drugs, SRHR, and others. Messaging to youth should be attractive and straightforward, and engaging youth in producing information is a good practice to ensure that. Use various forms to convey information or engage with youth - talk groups, workshops, peer exchange, printed materials, or jointly producing comics, zines, or social media campaigns.



9. Make use of the new technologies adopted by youths

Consider incorporating online platforms and social media into your activities. These platforms play a central role in many youth's lives and can be an effective way of reaching a population who, otherwise, would not get in touch with services. Several youths do not use drugs on the streets and are used to buying their drugs and discussing them online. Online harm reduction can help reach younger generations of people who use drugs and ensure continuity during periods where services need to close down, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.



10. Provide fun/recreational activities

Many young people might not have the opportunity to engage in appealing and healthy leisure activities, which could become an alternative to (problematic) drug use. Engaging leisure activities might be non-existent in specific settings or, when available, might not be free of charge and therefore not accessible to many. Leisure activities should be coordinated with youth interests and could be as simple as sports, a club to discuss movies, a games afternoon, or a creative expression-arts group



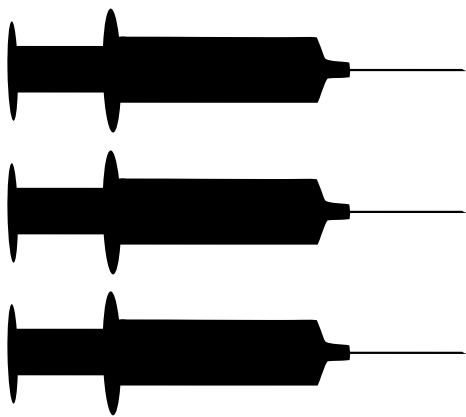
11. Address stigma among key populations

Stigma and discrimination against key populations such as people who inject drugs, people who use drugs considered more socially acceptable, sex workers, men who have sex with men, and LGBTIQ may also find their place inside harm reduction programs and in the relationship young people establish with each other. Addressing different identities and styles and fostering understanding and respect among the various sub-groups of youth promotes change and reduces stigma and discrimination.



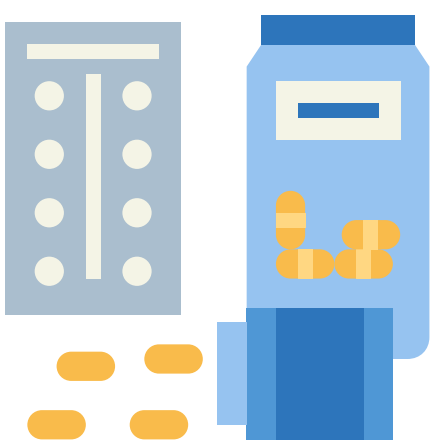
12. Help prevent young people who use drugs from switching to injecting their drugs

Several people initiate their drug use at very young ages, and, in many cases, the time between initiation of drug use and injecting drug use is very short. By investing in evidence based information sharing, it is possible to prevent young people from switching to more harmful forms of drug use, such as injecting.



13. Provide NSP to young people who inject drugs

Many young people who inject drugs do not have access to sterilized material for safer injecting. Programs might not be allowed to assist underage people, and buying syringes from a pharmacy might not be an option for many youths, either because of stigma or lack of financial means. Yet, young people who inject drugs must be provided with enough syringes and sterilized injection material, besides education on safer injection practices and other ways of reducing harm and accessing care. This can improve youth's quality of health and help decrease the outbreaks of hepatitis C among young people who inject drugs.



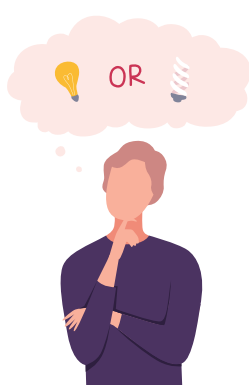
14. Address different drugs and their combinations

Many harm reduction programs around the world focus their activities on (injected) opioids only. Nevertheless, youths use and inject various drugs, including several types of stimulants (cocaine, methamphetamines), NPS, and prescription drugs. Often, these drugs are used in combination and/or to counter and regulate their effects. Especially young users, who may have less experience in drug use, need to have clear information on possible harms caused by the combination of different substances and how to reduce them.



15. Provide mental health support

Youth and adolescence are complex life-development phases, bringing several physical and psychological changes youths have to cope with. Besides, the specific group of young people who inject drugs may have several specific needs related to dealing with challenges that were either caused by drug use or led to drug use in the first place. They also may have questions about depression, bipolar disorders, drug-induced paranoia, or how psychiatric medications.



16. Foster autonomy and decision-making

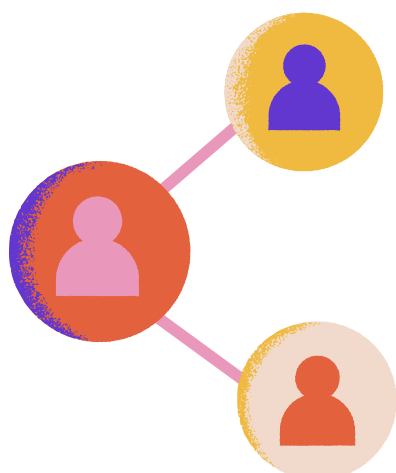
Provide youth with capacity building to plan and set goals, better manage finances, communicate with others, and manage conflicts. Such skills are helpful for life and can also help youth change their lifestyle and adopt safer drug use and sexual behaviours.

Networking



17. Sensitize and educate youth service providers and parents

This can help to reduce the stigma around drug use in young people and increase respect and space for young people's voices and needs. It is also a way of assuring parents and other service providers receive evidence-based information on drugs and harm reduction



18. Invest in building relevant networks

Young people who use drugs are usually closely connected to different services than the adult population. These may be schools, juvenile correction, and other youth specialized centers. A good relationship with other youth-related services can assure a good flow of referrals when needed. When investing in new partners, a successful approach to some programs described here emphasizes what your program can offer to them and not the contrary.



19. Inform about and refer youth to other youth-friendly services

In the first counselling or appointment, talk about all the services you can offer and the services you can refer to. Tell clients about other youth-friendly services available in the city - youth-friendly clinics, different types of psychological or legal support, and free-of-charge human rights organizations. Often, young people do not access services as they do not know that they exist.



20. Provide capacity building & share knowledge with other services

Capacity building is particularly relevant for other youth-oriented organizations working against oppressive and punitive regimes. But it is also most valuable for those programs initiating activities with youth or still challenged by how to cope with the challenges in assisting this key population. Share your knowledge & your challenges as a service provider for young people who inject drugs, especially with other

harm reduction services helping different groups of YPWUD. Learning and getting inspired from each other may help develop services better & have stronger support for advocacy.

Monitoring & Evaluation



21. Document and share information about your activities with young people who inject drugs

Your experience with this population can be precious to others. Please describe how your program develops youth-friendly activities and how it includes the perspectives of young people who inject drugs. In addition, you should document and share success and challenges to assist young people who inject drugs and how your project copes with them. As much as possible, collect data on the population helped, and conduct needs assessments and other types of studies to increase the understanding of the cultures and characteristics specific to the different sub-groups of young people who inject drugs.



22. Involve youth in monitoring and evaluating services

This can happen through formal or informal settings, where young clients partake in staff meetings, discussion of problems, advisory boards, or client boards. Clients can also directly collect and analyse service data.

Advocacy



23. Advocate for non-prohibitionist drug policies

Prohibition creates several obstacles to engaging young people who use drugs into care, promoting stigma and the breach of human rights. The criminalization of young people who use drugs is a significant structural barrier to service uptake, leading to mistrust of health workers and fear of disclosing drug use or carrying sterile material. Decriminalizing drug use and young people who use drugs is crucial to ensure this key population has its health rights respected.



24. Advocate for the removal of legal barriers to assist underage people who use drugs

In several countries, it is not possible to assist underage without their parents or legal representatives. This hinders youth who lost family bonds and those who do not feel comfortable sharing about drug use or other behaviours with their parents. Age restrictions to access harm reduction and related services must be removed, and youths must have their rights to secrecy guaranteed.



25. Advocate for the collection of disaggregated data on young people who use drugs

Young people injecting drugs must be represented in research and national surveys. More comprehensive age- disaggregated data is needed on the demographics, habits, and needs of young people who inject drugs and the factors contributing to injecting drug use, protective behaviors, and risk for

HIV, HCV, and STIs. Disaggregated data can help feedback policymaking help improve care access for young people who inject drugs.

General Principles

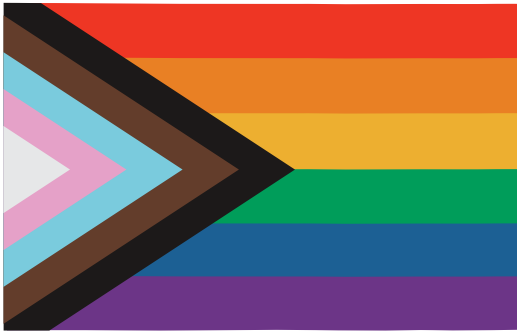


26. Meaningfully involve young people who inject drugs

Involve young people who inject drugs in programs as service providers (or peers) and in the planning, evaluation, and decision-making processes affecting programs. Engage young people who inject drugs from the start and increase young people who use drugs involvement. Educate young people who inject drugs on their rights and promote youth participation in community advisory boards and other spaces to be heard and influence policies and decisions that affect their lives. More activists and leaders are needed, and the young generation brings the promise of changing old patterns

27. Pay attention to intersectionality

Different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and specific needs of sub-groups of young people who use and inject drugs. This report described programs assisting young women who use drugs, young sex workers, young people living with HIV, and the young LGBTQI+ population. Other essential factors to consider are colour, ethnicity, mental health, religion, nationality, and criminal record. Different sub-groups of populations may need specific interventions or specific services to guarantee or improve access to care and cope with stigma and discrimination.



28. Combine expertise on people who use drugs and youth

Harm reduction projects dedicated to people who use drugs are experts in reaching a population who inject drugs, usually more hidden and vulnerable than those who do not inject. They have in-depth knowledge of different injecting paraphernalia and methods to educate people who inject drugs on safer injection and foster healthier injection practices. Youth-focused projects have great expertise in building youth-friendly services and connecting to a younger generation of people who use drugs. They can provide excellent advice on activities and general principles to follow when working with young people who use drugs.



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