Drug treatment services and injecting drug users in Queensland

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Recent restructuring in the government AOD sector and changes to funding have raised concerns about the availability of appropriate AOD services in Queensland.

Background

'Both detoxification with subsequent abstinence-oriented treatment and substitution maintenance treatment are essential components of an effective treatment system for people with opioid dependence.'
[1] WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS 2004: 8

'A range of appropriate, specialised services should be available to anyone with a drug-related problem, irrespective of personal history.'
[2] Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 2011:10

- High proportion of dependent use among people who inject drugs (PWID): 77% among recent opioid users, and 41% among recent stimulant users [3].
- Drug dependence has severe health and social consequences to the individual as well as a wider impact on the community together with a substantial financial cost [4].
- Benefits of treatment go beyond reduction in use and abstinence [5,6,7,8].
- Types of treatment available include: brief interventions, assessment, case-work support, counselling, detoxification services, residential rehabilitation, and the administration of opioid pharmacotherapies.
- However, these different treatment approaches may not be readily available to those who would like to access them.
- Difficulties include accurately assessing need for a health condition not easily identified because of the illicit nature of substance use; providing service coverage for PWID not living in inner city areas, for what is a relatively rare condition in the general population; and PWID's scepticism about the efficacy of treatment.
- Common barriers to PWID accessing treatment in Australia have been identified as lack of available places, long waiting lists, and treatment entry requirements [9].
- Negative effects of waiting lists are well documented, particularly the reduced chance of the PWID entering treatment [10,11].

Method

- Data from Queensland sample (n = 100) of National Illicit Drug Reporting System survey in 2013.
- Participants were people over 16 years of age who regularly inject drugs.

Results

Current treatment by socio-demographic characteristics

	Currently in treatment	Not in treatment
% Female (n=32)	44	56
% Male (n=68)	46	54
% Any crime (n=35)	40	60
% No crime (n=65)	48	52
% Aboriginal (n=15)	20*	80*
% Non-Aboriginal (n=85)	49	51
% Heterosexual (n=92)	47	53
% Non-heterosexual (n=8)	35	75
% 30 years or less	27	73
% More than 30 yrs	47	53

*p<.05 chi-square test.

Drug Dependency

The Dependency Scale is made up of 5 items, providing scores ranging from 0-15. A higher score corresponds to higher dependency.

Of those who had recently used an opioid and commented (n = 87), the median score was 7.0 (range 1-15), with 74% scoring five or above (the typical cut-off for the presence of opioid dependence).

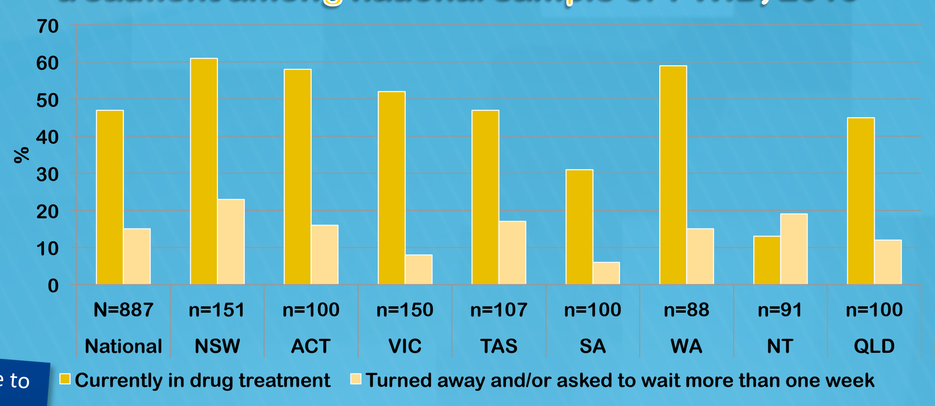
Of those who had recently used a stimulant and commented (n = 53), the median score was 2.0 (range 0-12), with 36% scoring four or above (the typical cut-off for the presence of stimulant dependence).

"It's harder and harder to get into rehab."

Main type of current treatment

	(n=100) %
Not in treatment	55
Methadone syrup	17
Suboxone (buprenorphine-naloxone)	15
Subutex (buprenorphine)	6
Drug counselling	3
Oxycodone	2
Narcotics Anonymous	1
Naltrexone implants	1
Valium	1

Current treatment and difficulty to access treatment among national sample of PWID, 2013



Current perceived access to drug treatment

	(n=53) %
Very difficult	38
Difficult	25
Easy	30
Very easy	8

* 'don't know' responses were excluded from this analysis.

Change in perceived availability of drug treatment services in previous six months.

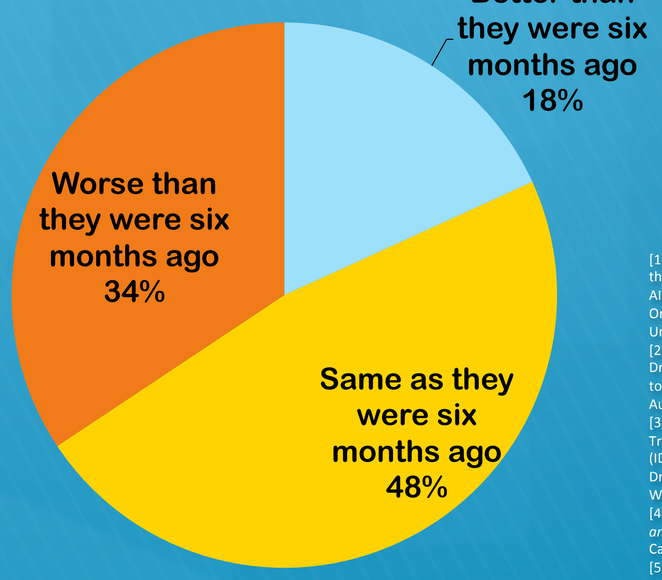
	(n=46) %
More difficult	46
Stable	46
Easier	7
Fluctuates	2

* 'don't know' responses were excluded from this analysis.

Number of people participants know who tried but were unable to access treatment in the previous six months.

	(n=65) %
No one	46
1 to 2 people	20
3 to 5 people	15
6 or more people	19

Perceived change in quality of treatment services in last six months (n=38)



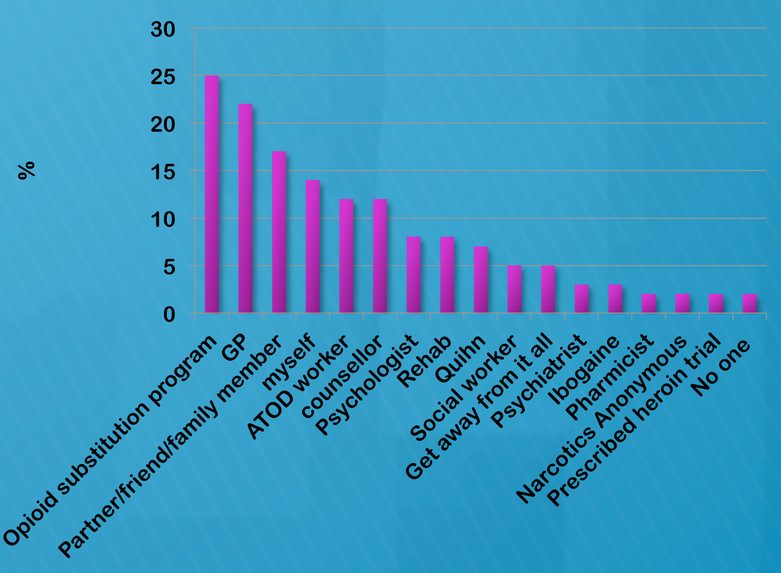
Key Findings

- Aboriginal people who inject drugs were less likely to currently be in drug treatment
- There is unmet need for treatment amongst PWID in Queensland
- PWID believe access to treatment services has become more difficult in the last 12 months
- The top three services/people nominated as being of the most assistance to reduce or stop drug use were OST program, GP, and partner/family member.

"The waiting lists are too long."

"The problem is getting into treatment."

PWID responses to who would most help to reduce or stop their drug use.



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