

# THE INTEGRATION OF HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES INTO ABSTINENCE-BASED THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF WHOS (WE HELP OURSELVES)

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**Introduction:** Harm reduction and abstinence-based approaches to treatment are often considered as being in opposition. Moral versus reality-based interventions have traditionally been contentious issues when attempting to bridge the gap of the two approaches. Therapeutic communities have long been associated with being abstinence/drug free services however a case study of We Help Ourselves will demonstrate how the two philosophies go hand in hand to provide the best possible outcomes for the individuals accessing treatment programs.

**Approach:** Since the emergence of HIV in the mid 1980's WHOS has been introducing harm reduction strategies into its programs. Consultation with consumers, staff and external stakeholders is essential due to the shift in philosophy from the traditional abstinence focus. Commencing with the introduction of NSP provision WHOS has over the years has increased harm reduction initiatives into all programs. Modification of the TC model has been undertaken to support the combining of the abstinence and harm reduction philosophy. Evaluating need and appropriateness of the WHOS Harm Reduction (HR) program is essential to the effectiveness of strategies provided.

**Results:** Programs are informed from consumer need and input to provide education on Infectious Disease, Overdose Prevention/CPR/Naloxone, Safer Sex and Infection Control. Responding to advances in the treatment of infectious disease is possible with provision of Liver and Sexual Health Clinics and the ability to commence individuals on treatment whilst in program. Services for those on opioid substitution treatment further breakdown barriers between abstinence and harm reduction.

**Conclusions:** Harm reduction and abstinence/drug free philosophies can and must go hand in hand acknowledging that not all individuals will achieve abstinence however health gains are paramount when working with drug users.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** The importance of this model is essential to drug policy reform in promoting harm reduction across all treatment modalities.