

## UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO STEROID USE IN AUSTRALIA: RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Dr Kate Seear  
 Senior Lecturer in Law, Monash University  
 Academic Director – Springvale Monash Legal Service  
 Associate Fellow, National Drug Research Institute, Social Studies of Addiction Concepts program

Twitter: @Kate\_Seear

### Introduction:

- Emerging evidence of a rise in the use of PIEDs in Australia and elsewhere;
- One subset of this: apparent increase in the use of steroids;
- Australia's National Drug Strategy Household Survey suggests overall prevalence remains relatively low (at 0.1%);
- Anecdotal claims about risky practices, concerns re sourcing of steroids and other injection-related harms.

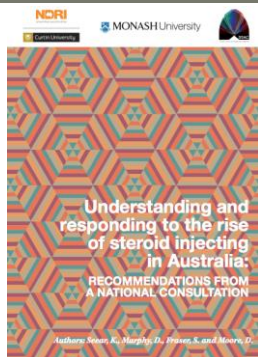


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### Consultation aims:

- Key issues for research into steroid use in Australia and for appropriate and effective social and public health responses;
- Gaps in Australia's knowledge about steroid use;
- Views on the degree of fit between research on steroid use and policy and practice in Australia;
- Views on the scale of steroid use in Australia; and
- Strategies for feeding back research to policy and service delivery in this area.



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### Findings:

- Belief that prevalence is greater than existing data suggests;
- Concerns about injecting practices including the risk of BBV transmission;
- Fear that the spread of BBVs within the steroid using community could 'turn around and bite you in the next few years' (SP8) if not addressed as a matter of urgency.

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### Findings:

- "The three cases that I've heard about recently, all had their steroids administered by a third party. All of them had what was described to be appalling injecting practices, so they hadn't really swabbed down the area, they hadn't waited for the alcohol solution to dry". (Participant 1)
- "A lot of the time guys are injecting each other, because they don't see themselves at risk, they don't take the precautions that they should with the blood and they'll be making things up and things will get contaminated. Benches will get contaminated and there's that cross-contamination there". (Participant 2)
- "I mean people have described blood everywhere from multiple insertions of small needles to the desired part, so it becomes multiply punctured [...] So it can be very messy and in terms of infection control and stuff, that's a really unsavoury picture isn't it?" (Participant 3)

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### Findings:

- Need for more information on the minutiae of injecting practices:

"The injecting patterns for this population, the use patterns [...] initiation into injecting PIEDs. Do people inject themselves? Are they injected by others? Do they inject others? I'm always really keen to understand that around any injecting process. You know, does it happen alone, is it happening in groups? What happens to the equipment? What's their understanding of blood borne viruses? Are they being tested for hep C, hep B, HIV?" (Participant 4)

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## Findings:

- Concerns about knowledge about safer injecting, where participants often learn how to inject:

“Through what’s often called ‘Bro Science’, so it’s stuff that’s talked about in the gyms”. (Participant 5)

## Conclusions:

- Novel methods of engaging with people who inject steroids in future research, including diverse recruitment strategies, greater engagement with key figures and key stakeholders;
- More research on the minutiae of injecting practices;
- Consider novel approaches to and multiple methods for providing harm reduction messaging and safer injecting strategies, including NSPs, gyms, other;
- Consider what messages and imagery are most likely to resonate with people who inject steroids, allowing for the possibility that their needs and information priorities may overlap with and diverge from other people who inject drugs.

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- Full report freely available at: [addictionconcepts.com](http://addictionconcepts.com)