

The right to self-determination for drug user organisations (DUOs) is critical if we are to fulfill our role working to advance the rights and improve health outcomes for people who inject drugs (PWID).

Drug User Organisations like NUAAs were set up in Australia largely as a response to the advent of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s. Traditionally NUAAs had been funded to undertake blood-borne virus (BBV) prevention work with people who inject drugs (PWID).

Over time this focus has led to a strong relationship with the AIDS & Infectious Diseases Branch (AIDB) of the NSW Health Department. Unfortunately the strength of this relationship has not extended to some of the other areas that impact directly on PWID. Such areas include, for example; treatment provision and research.

The issues faced by PWID are many and varied and many impact on our health. We are often expected by our partners in government and NGOs to work on and respond to these other issues, and yet we are often not funded to do so. Being able to determine what issues are most important for PWID and having the freedom to determine how to deal with these issues is crucial if we are to truly represent and work for PWID effectively.

NUAA must be seen as a valid and equal partner on all the issues which affect PWID: especially when we are the primary affected community. Our strong and ongoing partnership with the AIDB is an example we would like to follow with all of these issues.

- Drug user organisations have a valid role and this needs to be validated by governments, policy makers and other individuals and organisations in the field.
- The role of drug user organisations is unique and is one that cannot be duplicated by other organisations.
- Drug user organisations are organisations that are governed, managed and run by people who use/inject illicit drug users. It is crucial that control and power is held by peers to ensure that the dilution of drug user self organising does not take place
- Drug user organisations have the responsibility to ensure the sustainability and development of the drug user's movement and are expected to focus on the empowerment and inclusion of people who inject/use illicit drugs that are interested in formalising their role within the movement. This includes developing and delivering training programs and initiatives that can introduce individuals to the roles and responsibilities of drug user organisations
- Drug user organisations must be committed to the principles of harm reduction, peer education and support, community development and advocate for the health and human rights of injecting/ illicit drug users
- Drug user organisations need to be sufficiently funded for all the initiatives and activities that they undertake. It is not acceptable for drug user organisations to carry out activities by default with no specific funding.
- Drug user organisations are the only vehicle from which legitimate consumer representation can take place.
- Working within the models of self determination and consensus, drug user organisations are best placed to ensure appropriate representation to governments, non drug user organisations and other relevant stakeholders
- It is not appropriate for non drug user organisations to speak out or represent people who inject/use illicit drugs
- Drug user organisations should always be recognised as fully equal partners in any partnership and this must apply to funding as well.