
HOW TO BE IN THE ROOM

MODULES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS TO BE ENGAGED IN EFFECTIVE DRUG POLICY



AN INTRODUCTION INTO THE ROLE WE PLAY IN DRUG POLICY

The overdose crisis is killing 14 people every day in Canada¹. It has never been more urgent for PWUD to be a part of developing and implementing new drug policies. This is because our personal experiences are one of the most valuable tools that can be utilized to end this crisis.

Our lives have and continue to show the scars of ill-informed public drug policy. We see this in the marginalization, criminalization, grief, violence, stigma, and discrimination that we experience². And when decision-makers make public policy without learning from PWUD and our experiences, it often results in something called [negative externalities](#)³. This is a term borrowed from the field of economics and describes the unintended negative consequences of a policy change. For example, when the opioid OxyContin™ was delisted, there was an increase in overdose deaths because people started replacing their Oxy usage with heroin and fentanyl. Without the input and feedback of PWUD, policy with negative externalities or unintended consequences is more likely to be implemented. So while our presence ITR can be threatening to those in decision making roles, it is important that we are there so we can end harmful policy, and make sure that real solutions that will benefit PWUD are put into effect.

WE NEED TO BE LEADING POLICY MAKER MEETINGS

INCLUSION IS NEVER ENOUGH

EMPOWERMENT IS

WAYS TO BRING ATTENTION TO YOUR COMMUNITIES NEEDS



Direct Action

When the government would not implement a proper overdose response, PWUD and their allies took things into their own hands and created unsanctioned OPSs. This form of direct action transformed policies, expanded overdose prevention services and changed laws. It garnered national attention and the media helped to bring the issues to people's attention.



Letter-writing Campaigns and Writing to Decision-makers & Politicians

If other members of your community are concerned about the same issue, collectively you can start a letter-writing campaign. This technique has been used to show support for the unsanctioned OPS in Ottawa, when hundreds of people wrote to Ottawa's mayor, city council, and public health unit. See Appendix B of the guidebook for contact information for your federal or provincial Health Minister.

Writing a Letter to the Editor or an Opinion Editorial (OPED)

Writing a letter to the editor or an OPED can increase your ability to reach both the public and decision-makers. An opinion¹⁸ piece is an article usually around 600-700 words that uses facts to persuade the general public about an issue or need for the community. Controlling the narrative is one of the best ways we can change the societal stigma. A lot of editors are willing to work with PWUD to share their stories.



Rallies, Demonstrations, Protests, & Awareness Days

Hosting a rally can be a powerful way to show public support for PWUD and their human rights. Seeking out like-minded community organizations to organize and participate can increase publicity and attendance at your rally.

Also, a lot of our demonstrations are raising awareness for international days for a variety of intersectoral topics for PWUD. These are days to get out and make some loud noise in your community advocating for change. This is a great way to show your community you have formed a group for PWUD.



Reaching Out to Media

If you follow your local news, reach out to reporters covering the overdose epidemic and make them aware of issues that you think need publicity. Reporters can be allies or enemies, so it is good to build a relationship with the supporting reporters. Keep in mind that a lot of reporters may not be covering the story for the right reasons and often use stigmatizing language. If that is the case, you need to contact the editor and request for the language be amended.



Social Media

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter²⁰ can be powerful tools to get the general public's and the government's attention. Since these platforms are used by so many people, they can be used to raise public awareness about issues or causes in your community. The government generally does not shift their positions unless they have public support on an issue, and social media is a great tool for building public support.

Start a Facebook Page

Use it to share local news and to provide a platform for discussion about these issues impacting PWUD.

Use Instagram

Using Instagram to publish photos, art, and images can help amplify your voice. Instagram is a great platform to share images and gain attention.



Figure 3: Examples of graphics from CAPUD's Facebook page

Get a Twitter Account

If you do not feel comfortable using your real name, use an alias. Learn to tag the local media and politicians in your tweets to get their attention.

Create Graphics

If you are creating graphic art definitely look into creating an Instagram account to spread your message to the world. For graphic examples check out CAPUD's [Facebook](#) page, it has dozens of examples. Designs can be as simple as white text on a black background. Software programs, like Microsoft Paint, PowerPoint and Canva can be used to make simple, effective graphics that spread the word very quickly as well.

COMPENSATION FOR YOUR EXPERTISE



Compensation for your expertise

What honorarium will I receive for participating: _____

- *Good amounts for presentations: minimum \$200*
- *Good amounts for conferences: per diems ranging from \$100-\$150*
- *Good amounts for meetings/focus groups: \$25/hour*

Can I receive this via:

Cash	Y	N
Cheque	Y	N
E-transfer	Y	N
Direct deposit	Y	N

Per diems for the day: _____

FOCUS GROUPS, MEETINGS, AND/OR RESEARCH GROUPS.



Who is attending and running the session?

What organization is running the session? _____

What is the purpose of the session? _____

Is it a one-time session, or an on-going working group? _____

How is confidentiality being handled? _____

How many people are attending the session? _____

Will other PWUD be in attendance? _____

Can I invite other PWUD? _____

SCHEDULING AND LOGISTICS



Scheduling & Logistics:

Session topic: _____

Session format: Online In-Person Other _____

Session address: _____

Time of engagement: _____

Will breaks be provided?: Y N

Transportation provided to and from? _____