

# Healthy or harmful? A realist review on the impact of health system engagement for people who use drugs

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## Context

Engaging people with lived experience in research, health system planning and delivery is emerging as best practice. Benefits to the system are many but less investigated are the personal impacts on participants (Brown 2019). Although it is assumed that people who use drugs (PWUD) will benefit by engaging in the health system beyond receiving services, this population often faces systemic oppression and are at risk of tokenization and stigma, amongst other harms arising from lack of meaningful engagement.

## Objective

To understand how, for whom, and under what circumstances health system engagement improves and/or worsens the health and wellbeing of individual PWUD (Program theory).

## Design

Population: PWUD (excluding exclusive use of legal substances ie. Alcohol/tobacco/cannabis)

Intervention: Health system engagement – participation in health system planning, delivery, advocacy or research (excluding being a service recipient)

Outcome: Improvements or worsening of personal health and well-being, defined in a holistic sense (physical, emotional, spiritual, and social).

Realist reviews are useful for examining complex social interventions within complex systems. It is an explanatory model that uncovers what, for whom, and under what circumstances give rise to certain outcomes. Using context-mechanism-outcome configurations a program theory is developed which postulates how an intervention works.

## Realist Review Methodology

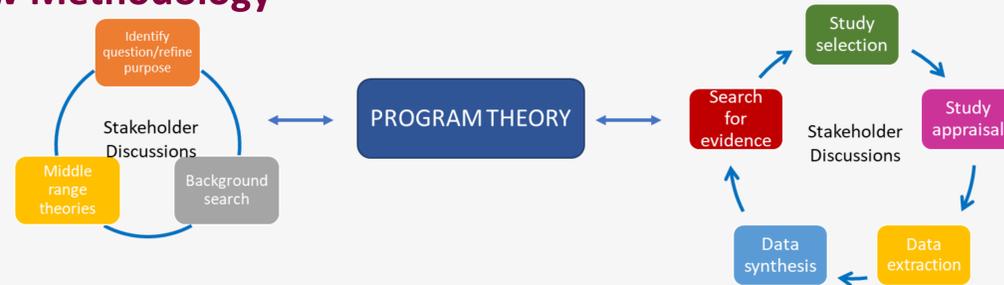


Figure 1. Initial program theory was developed in summer 2020 by our interdisciplinary team, considering relevant literature and existing middle range theories. Through an iterative process, where relevant articles will be searched for, selected, appraised, extracted, and synthesized, along with relevant discussions, the program theory will be refined. We have currently extracted 23 articles, with plans to expand our search to multiple databases.

## Preliminary Findings

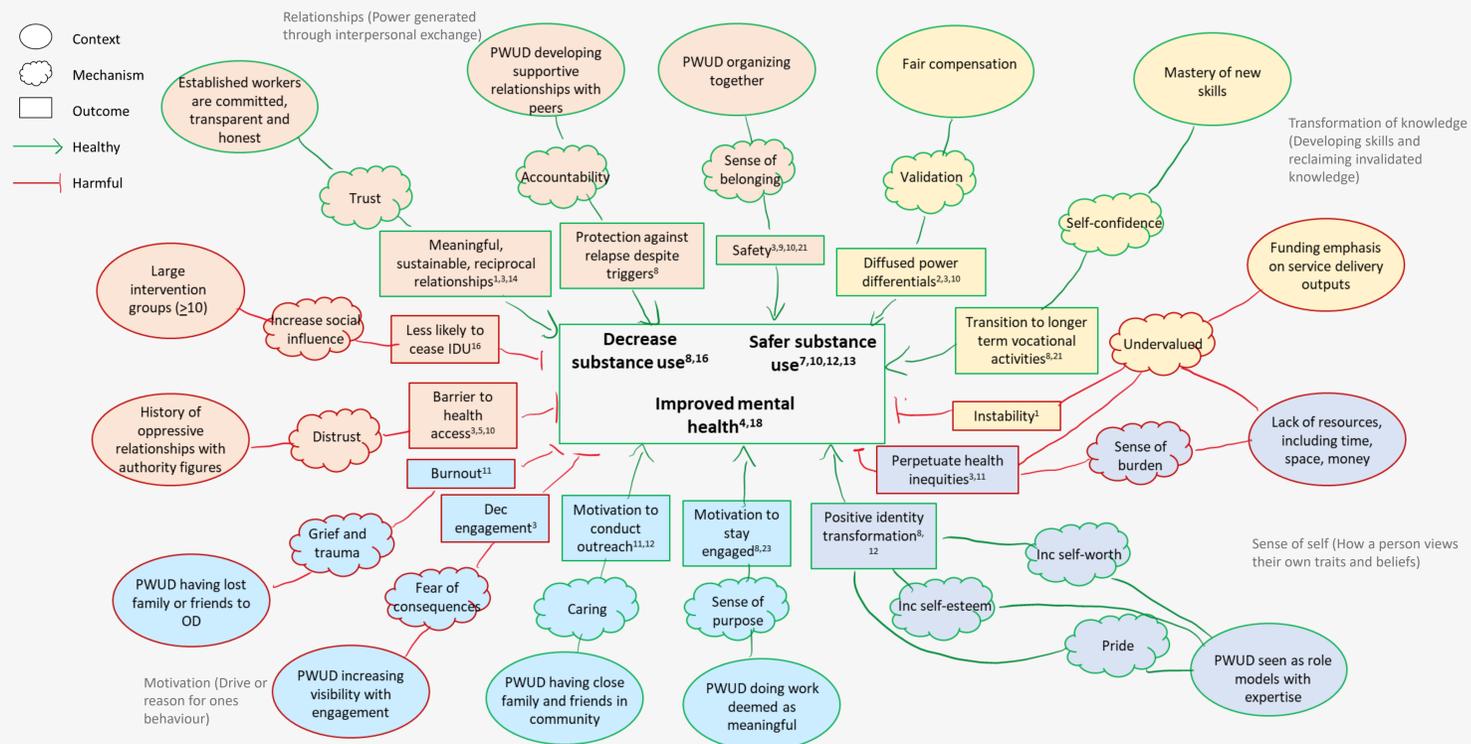


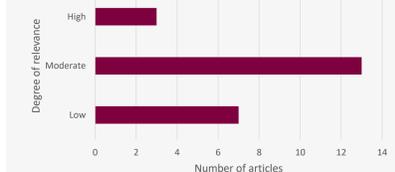
Figure 2. Refined program theory incorporating our preliminary extraction of 23 articles postulating how PWUD participating in health system engagement maybe personally impacted.

## Conclusions

Our ongoing research will uncover the nuances of the underlying program theory that explains the health outcomes of PWUD participating in health system engagement. This will serve to inform how their health and wellbeing can be supported, while preventing harms.

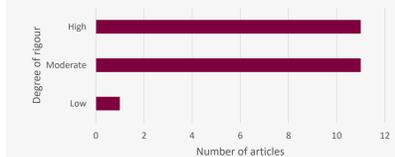
## Relevance

Does the study address the theory under review?



## Rigor

Are the methods used to generate the relevant data credible and trustworthy?



## Study Type

Study Type	Number
Community Based Participatory Research	4
Cohort study	2
Cross Sectional	1
Ethnographic study	3
RCT	2
Descriptive	2
Commentary	2
Review (literature, rapid, systematic, scoping)	5
Project evaluation	1
Other – quasi cohort/cross-sectional	1



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## References

<http://bit.ly/HHreferences>