

“Nothing About Us Without Us”: *A manifesto by people who use illegal drugs*



This manifesto was made by people who use drugs who participated in the consultations of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network's project on greater involvement of people who use drugs. It is based on similar work done in Australia, which is gratefully acknowledged. Participants in the project expressed their hope that people who use drugs in Canada and elsewhere would either adopt this manifesto and use it to claim their rights, or use it as the basis for creating their own manifesto.

WE are among the most vilified and demonized groups in society. Simply because we use illegal drugs, people and governments often deny us our rights and dignity.

WE are the “junkies” of the popular media.

WE are tagged as “undeserving troublemakers” even among some of those charged with our care.

WE have been hard hit by the epidemics of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

WE are regularly excluded from the decisions that affect our lives and those of our brothers and sisters.

WE are your sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters.

*Today, we demand to have a say.
We demand that governments and
citizens see our humanity.
We, too, deserve respect!*

WE have the right to become involved in activities that affect our health and well-being.

WE have the right to be able to make informed decisions about our health, including what we do or do not put into our bodies.

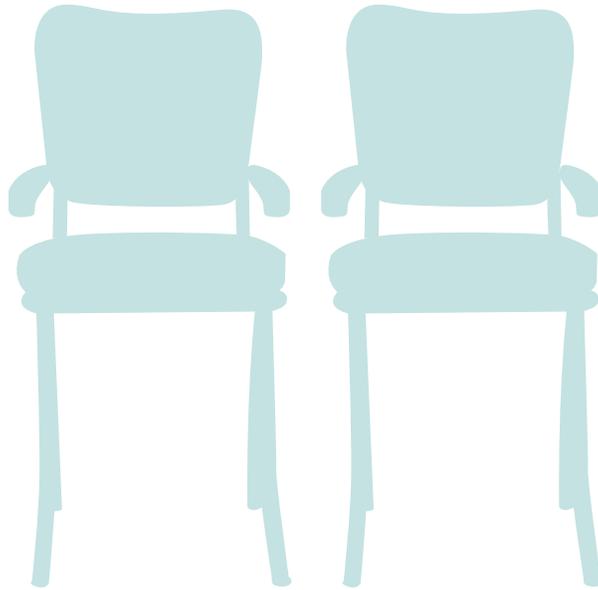
WE have unique expertise and experiences and have a vital role to play in defining the health, social, legal, and research policies that affect us.

WE have the capacity to:

- educate and to be educated;
- form organizations;
- manage funding;
- represent our community;
- serve on government consultative committees; and
- be employed in a variety of roles as people who inject/use drugs.

WE need to:

- be treated as equals and respected for our expertise and professionalism in addressing drug use, HIV, hepatitis C, and the other health and social issues that affect our lives;
- be recognized for the work we do, often without funding, in addressing HIV, hepatitis C and other health problems facing people who use drugs;
- be adequately funded and provided with the resources to represent and address our needs, including the needs of those of us who are living with HIV or hepatitis C;
- be supported when demonized and attacked in the media and by the community because of who we are;
- be supported in fighting the fear, shame and stigma that keep us from fully participating in our communities and from accessing health services, and that contribute to health problems like HIV and hepatitis C;
- be supported to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be good peer educators and advocates and to run professional organizations;
- be meaningfully involved at all levels of the organizations that provide services to us, in particular organizations providing HIV/AIDS and/or HCV-related services or other health or social services;
- be included in consultative processes, as well as in decision-making or policy-making bodies and advisory structures dealing with issues related to HIV/AIDS, HCV, and illegal drugs; and
- be involved in research that affects us, including through community review committees and community consent processes.



As people who use drugs, **our organizations** have an important role to play in advocating for our rights and for our health and well-being. Our organizations:

- need to work towards being governed, managed and run by people who use illegal drugs, with power and control held by people who use drugs; measurable progress towards control by people who use drugs must be demonstrated;
- are best placed to ensure appropriate representation to governments, non-drug user organizations and other relevant stakeholders;
- need to be recognized as valid and valued participants in any policies and programs dealing with drug use, including those aimed at reducing harms sometimes associated with drug use, such as HIV and hepatitis C;
- need to be recognized as participants in policies and programs dealing with other health and social issues that affect our lives, such as mental health, housing, welfare;
- must be treated with respect and as equals in all partnership arrangements with governments and other organizations;
- have a responsibility to the larger movement of people who use drugs and strive to empower and include people who use drugs;
- are committed to the principles of harm reduction, peer education and support, and community development; and
- fight for the health and human rights of people who use illegal drugs.

WE are part of the solution, not part of the problem!

And we stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in other countries. They often suffer even greater abuses of their human rights. We demand that our government take action not only in Canada, but also at the international level, so that drug use is treated as a health issue first and foremost, and we are involved in decisions that affect our lives.

Copies of this manifesto and other documents on greater involvement of people who use drugs are available on the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network website at www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/issues/druglaws/greater_involvement.htm and through the Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre (email: aids/sida@cpha.ca). Reproduction of the manifesto is encouraged, as is adaptation of its contents. For further information, contact the Network (tel: 416 595-1666; fax: 416 595-0094; email: info@aidslaw.ca). *Ce manifeste est également disponible en français.*

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