Harm Reduction Coalition

- Founded in 1994 to work with individuals and communities at risk for HIV infection due to drug use and high-risk sexual behaviors.

- The Harm Reduction Coalition is a national advocacy and capacity-building organization that promotes the health and dignity of individuals and communities impacted by drug use.
HRC Programs & Services

- The Institute @HRC
  - Capacity Building for Syringe Access Services Mobilization
  - HIV Prevention Capacity Building Initiative for CBOs
  - Harm Reduction Training Institute
  - Overdose Prevention Programs (SKOOP/DOPE)
  - LGBT Project

- Policy Advocacy

- National and Regional Conferences
Agenda For Today’s Webinar

- Why Is There A Need for IDU Cultural Competency?
- What Is IDU Cultural Competency?
- Understanding IDUs and IDU Experience
- IDU Cultural Competency- Principles & Practices
- Questions and Answers
Why Is There A Need For IDU Cultural Competency?

When empowered, minority communities are up to the challenge [to help themselves]. The challenge to professionals is to develop the understanding and commitment necessary to embark on such an ambitious journey.

Terry Cross, *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*
Why Is There A Need For IDU Cultural Competency?

• Reduce Drug User Stigma

• Increase Trust and Improve Engagement with Clients

• Improve Individual and Community Health
Reduce Drug User Stigma

- Stigma against drug users can pose a barrier to drug users accessing services.
- Providers can start to dismantle stigma by meaningfully engaging with clients.
Increase Trust and Improve Engagement with Clients

Demonstrating cultural competency
More meaningful engagement
More effective interventions
Improve Individual and Community Health

Research has demonstrated that provider-consumer communication is linked to:

- Consumer satisfaction
- Adherence to medical instructions
- Health outcomes

…Practicing cultural competence makes our clients healthier!
What Is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence is the ability to not only recognize and appreciate other cultures and beliefs, but also the ability to work effectively with them.
Cultural competency involves…

- Acknowledging the importance of culture in peoples’ lives.
- Respecting intercultural and intracultural differences/diversity
- Minimizing the negative consequences of cultural differences
Cultural competency involves…

- A non-hierarchical relationship between consumer and provider

- A commitment and engagement with the lifelong process of learning- no “endpoint”
Cultural Humility

- A concept developed in contrast to the notion of an attainable “mastery” implied by the term cultural competency
- Engagement in self-critique and reflection
- Highlights the importance of language in practicing cultural competency
The process of cultural competency
Understanding IDU Experience

Engaging in dialogue with injecting drug users to better understand their histories and experiences is a critical element in the process of IDU cultural competency.
Why do people inject?

- Pleasure
- Dependence
- Exposure to injecting practices
- Purity of the drug
- Type of drug
- Supply of drug
- Cost of drug
- Law enforcement practices
Six Domains of Psychosocial Functioning

- Physical health
- Mental health
- Spirituality
- Legal or financial
- Vocational (work or school)
- Social (including family relationships) or recreational
Understanding Drug-Related Stigma

Stigma is a significant part of the experience of injecting drug users. Understanding stigma is important so as to avoid reinforcing it, and to better counteract its negative psychosocial effects.
Key Elements of Drug-Related Stigma

- Blame and moral judgment
- Criminalize
- Pathologize
- Patronize
- Fear and Isolate
Implications...

.... you tell them you have a drug addiction background or you’ve done drugs, they’re thinking you’re trying to get free medication to get high....

...chased me out, treated me like a child....

..but they’re scared to go to the doctor, for the fear they’re gonna be blackballed, turned away, treated like a thief, or worse....
Implications for Providers

- Willingness to access services
- Relationships and trust
- Participant risk and behaviors
- Participant self-worth
- Funding
Images

- Images play an important role in our perceptions of reality

- Media repeats certain images while downplaying others, shaping attitudes and opinions
Images

- Images can perpetuate stigma by portraying simple, monolithic identities for IDUs, which are associated with certain attitudes.

- IDUs are not just injectors, not just represented by syringes.
Language (www.wordle.net)
Drug User Labels

- Appearance and Ability
- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender Identity/Sexual Orientation
- Stage of drug use?
- Health Status
- Parent/Child
- Which drugs?
- Prescribed or street?
- Choosing to abstain?
Stages of Drug Use/Continuum of Drug Use

- Experimental Use
- Social & Ritual Use
- Situational Use
- Binge Use
- Abuse
- Dependence
- Severely and Persistently Chemically Dependent

Abstinent

Recovering
So what can you do?
Principles of IDU Cultural Competency

1. Understand the role of stigma in the lives of drug users
2. Recognize the multiple social inequalities faced by IDU
3. Nonjudgmental and non-coercive provision of services
4. Compassionate pragmatism vs. moral idealism
5. Ensuring that the communities served have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies
6. Embracing a multi-tiered, collaborative model
Multiple social inequalities

Injection Drug User

- Homelessness
- Sexism/Homophobia/Transphobia
- Medical and Mental Health Issues
- Racism/Nationalism
- Incarceration
- Trauma
Nonjudgmental and non-coercive provision of services
Compassionate pragmatism vs. moral idealism

- HIV is a greater threat than drug use
- Abstinence may not be a goal
- An effective means of respecting the priorities of users when engaging them
Ensuring that the communities served have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies.

- Respectful
- Relevant
- Responsive

“Nothing about us without us”
A Multi-Tiered Collaborative Model
Individual Staff Member Level

Language
Honesty and Transparency
Authentic Relationship-Building
Dialogue and Disclosure
Education and Personal Development
Agency and Community Levels

Organizational Level
- Professional development
- Feedback & supervision
- Monitoring & evaluation
- Hiring & staffing practices

Community Level
- Community Engagement
- Awareness Campaigns
- Policy and Advocacy
- Community Asset
Final Thoughts

The more you know, the more you know you don’t know.
Ways to Keep the Work Going

- Build relationships within and outside your agency (at trainings, conferences, etc.)
- Increase your knowledge and skill ([http://www.harmreduction.org/training](http://www.harmreduction.org/training))
- Seek out capacity building
- Other ideas???
For More Information

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This webinar was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number PS09-906 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.