

New analysis finds stigma stopping evidence-based response to drug overdoses in UK

August 22 2023



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A new analysis in the *BMJ* argues that UK government opposition to drug consumption rooms is rooted in societal stigma

Dr. Andrew Guise has led on the publication in the *British Medical Journal* arguing that the UK government's opposition to drug consumption rooms is rooted in long running and societal-wide stigma towards people who use drugs.

Drug overdoses are a growing problem worldwide, in the UK the number of people dying from [drug overdose](#) is rising, with over 4000 deaths reported in 2021. In response to this issue, many countries have drug consumption rooms.

Drug consumption rooms are sites where people can use drugs within the facility and under the supervision of staff and volunteers trained to provide emergency care. These facilities provide a safe and accessible space to help reduce fatal overdose rates and enable further access to other health and [social services](#).

A combination of an increase in drug overdose death and evidence of their success has led to calls for the UK to establish drug consumption rooms from activists, scientists and politicians. An unsanctioned mobile drug consumption room was opened in Glasgow between September 2020 and May 2021 without [government support](#), which was found to reverse nine cases of overdose and support people in unstable housing.

"Drug Consumption Rooms are globally evidenced to prevent overdose deaths and so should be introduced in the UK. Yet UK Governments have long blocked the introduction of Drug Consumption Rooms. This

opposition is underpinned by society wide stigma towards people who use drugs and needs to be challenged by [medical authorities](#)," says Guise, Senior lecturer in Social Science and Health

However, as argued by the authors, stigmatizing labels and assumptions from the UK government are part of widely circulating [societal norms](#). The opposition to reforming current drug policy and introducing drug consumption rooms is supported by social and structural barriers, stopping such a program being initiated.

The article cites a range of studies conducted on drug consumption rooms throughout the globe, highlighting Canadian rooms as a well studied example, with one room based in Vancouver being associated with a 26% net reduction in the fatal [overdose](#) rate within its vicinity. A systematic review of drug consumption rooms also found them to be associated with reduced morbidity and mortality, alongside greater access to addiction treatment without increasing incidents of crime.

The authors call on medical and public health authorities to challenge stigmatization, change the language and framing used for people who use drugs and address gaps within our knowledge on effectiveness by establishing pilots for [drug](#) consumption rooms.

More information: Andy Guise et al, Stigma is stopping an evidence based response to drug overdose deaths in the UK, *British Medical Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj-2023-074934](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-074934)

Provided by King's College London

Citation: New analysis finds stigma stopping evidence-based response to drug overdoses in UK (2023, August 22) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-08-analysis->

stigma-evidence-based-response-drug.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.