SUICIDE AMONGST DRUG USERS:
A CHALLENGE FOR DRUG TREATMENT AGENCIES

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What is suicide?

- **Completed suicide**
  - Deliberate self-harm, with the intention of causing death, resulting in death
  - 3:1 males to females

- **Attempted suicide**
  - Deliberate self-harm with the intention of causing death not resulting in death
  - 3:1 females to males

- 10-20 attempts for every completion

- Distinct from self-harm
How common is suicide?

- **Completions**
  - >2,000 per year in Australia (7x homicides)
  - Males approximately 1600 per year
  - Females approximately 500 per year

- **Attempts**
  - Lifetime: 3%-5%
  - Past year: 0.5%
Drug users and suicide

- High general mortality
  - 1% drug users die per year

- Suicide as a cause of death: 5-10%

- Lifetime attempts: 30-50%
  - ATOS: 34%
  - WHOS: 36%
Drug users and suicide

- Past year: 5-15%
  - ATOS: 11%
  - WHOS: 15%

- An attempt heightens risk of further attempts
  - ATOS: attempt 5 times more likely if previous attempt
  - ¼ those with suicidal ideation made an attempt across 3 years
Same as general population, but prevalence far greater

Gender
- Attempts: females 3 times more likely
- Completions: males 3 times more likely

Previous attempts
- Predicts later attempts and completions
- Suicidal ideation and plans

“Shattered childhood”
- Sex abuse
- Physical abuse
Risk factors

- **Psychopathology**
  - Depression
  - PTSD
  - Borderline Personality Disorder

- **Social disadvantage**
  - Unemployment
  - Homelessness
  - Social isolation
  - Imprisonment

- **Drug use**
  - Dependence
  - More extensive polydrug use
Can drug treatment reduce suicide rates? YES

- Baseline: 11.4%
- 12 mths: 7.8%
- 24 mths: 5.4%
- 36 mths: 2.3%

% attempt in past year

ATOS wave