Understanding Substance Misuse

Let’s yarn about something that can hurt us, our mob and community. Let’s talk about the misuse of alcohol and other drugs. It can be a hard thing to talk about and the journey can be long and challenging, but remember with the right support, together we can heal.

When we talk about 'substance misuse', it means the wrong use or too much use of things listed below:

- Tobacco – smoke
- Alcohol – grog, spirits,
- Cannabis – gunja, weed, green, dope, wacky backy
- Meth/amphetamine and other stimulants - ice
- Pharmaceuticals – oxies, bupe, codeine, methadone, zanies
- Illicit opioids, including heroin,
- Psychoactive – mushrooms, acid trips,
- New (and emerging) psychoactive substances

WHY DO WE MISUSE GROG AND OTHER DRUGS?

Sometimes, we might be just trying to unwind, having a good time, numbing our pain, hiding from our troubles in life. But if we don’t accept this as a problem, it can lead to a big problem when we are depending on these substances to get us through a tough time. We then forget how to handle stress in a healthy way. Using these substances might seem like it helps at first, but it can cause big health and wellbeing problems later physically, socially, and emotionally.

Some substances can really hook you in (known as addictive), both in your body and your mind, especially if you're using them more and more. If you find it hard to control your behaviour and the choices you are making, or if your brain's 'stop' signal isn't working well, you might have a substance misuse problem.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU'RE MISUSING SUBSTANCES?

You might start to drop your responsibilities and lose interest in things you used to enjoy like work, exercise, hobbies, sport, spending time with your mob.

- You could be doing risky things – like driving under the influence, gamble, unsafe sex, or using dirty needles.
- Sometimes, you might start stealing to buy illegal substances, or even hurting yourself or others.
- Your relationships might suffer – fights with your partner and mob and losing friendships.
- Your body might start to get used to the substance and need more to get the same feeling; you might feel sick when you're not using the substance.
- You might start to feel down, anxious, paranoid, or even have psychosis. These substances might even bring out mental problems that were hidden.
- When you find it hard to cut down or stop using the substance.
- Your life feels taken over by the substance and you find it hard to function.

THE RISKS OF MISUSING GROG AND OTHER DRUGS

Both legal and illegal drugs like gunja, ice, and cocaine can be misused and might lead to an accidental overdose or even death.

Sometimes when we use substances to try to handle or hide mental problems, our mental health issues are not being treated in a healthy way. Substance misuse can also make us think about harming ourselves or suicide. When you're under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, our judgement gets cloudy, you might lose control, and do things without thinking.

Please reach out if you need emergency help 000 or 112 on a mobile.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE DOES NOT WANT HELP?

- Give them information about the dangers of grog and drug use.
- Show them that you care and worry about them.
- Set rules for behaviour you do not like such as: aggressive behaviour, substance use in the house.
- Allow them space to think, don't nag them to get help.
- Make sure they know where to get help, when they are ready.
- Get help for yourself from a GP, counsellor, or psychologist, Aboriginal Health Practitioners/Workers. They can give information sheets and suggestions on how to best support the person, and how to look after yourself.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND SUPPORT?

If you need help, you can call 13YARN at any time, day or night, at 13 92 76. You can also chat online at www.lifeline.org.au 24/7. For information on local services and centres, **visit www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/service-finder**.

Other places for help:

- National Cannabis Information and Helpline: **1800 30 40 50** or www.ncpic.org.au
- Alcoholics Anonymous Australia: **1300 222 222** or www.aa.org.au
- Narcotics Anonymous Australia: **1300 652 820** or www.na.org.au
- Quitline: **13 78 48** or www.quit.org.au
- Mensline Australia: **1300 78 99 78**
- Kids Helpline: **1800 55 1800**
- Headspace ***(Age 12–25)***: www.headspace.org.au

It's important to know when your use of grog or other drugs becomes a problem and get help. Remember, you're not alone in this journey. Together, we can heal.

