“Women Never Use Drugs Alone”
Assessing Stigma & Access to Care among Women who use Drugs.

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Background
Illicit drug use remains a public health threat to communities and individuals across Indiana as demonstrated by increased:
- Number of overdose related deaths, HIV, Viral Hepatitis and many other health harms.
People who use drugs (PWUD) face numerous social and structural barriers that impede access to care and prevention services. Within this vulnerable patient population, women who use drugs are especially susceptible to these barriers.
- In general PWUD experience greater health disparities and have lower engagement in care.
- Stigma, illicit drug use, and other social determinants of health are commonly cited as healthcare barriers among this population.

Findings

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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Threatening my recovery:</td>
<td>“They shouldn’t have prescribed me the opiates because I was honest and I told them I was a IV drug user and I told them opiates was my drug of choice.”</td>
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<td>Denying care:</td>
<td>When looking for help with depression,… “I didn’t want to go back and use drugs so I went in and they just looked at me and said, ‘Well, we’re not going to give you anything because we know about you.'”</td>
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<td>Judging my treatment choices:</td>
<td>“Well we’re not going to give you anything because we know you’re on suboxone, I wasn’t even asking for anything, I just wanted antibiotics to kill the infection.”</td>
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Implications and Future Directions
The current research highlights areas of concern for both health systems and individual healthcare providers.

Health System:
- Explore more effective methods of Department of Child Services involvement in prenatal care for mothers with a history of substance use in a way that reduces fear of medical providers.
- Improve education of medical students and current physicians on managing patients with substance use disorder and treatment options with former and/or current drug users involved in education and curriculum development.

Healthcare Providers:
- Explore ways to better educate patients about their health risks - pregnancy, prescriptions, mental health etc.
- Work with community partners and health advocates to better understand and better address the health needs of this vulnerable population

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