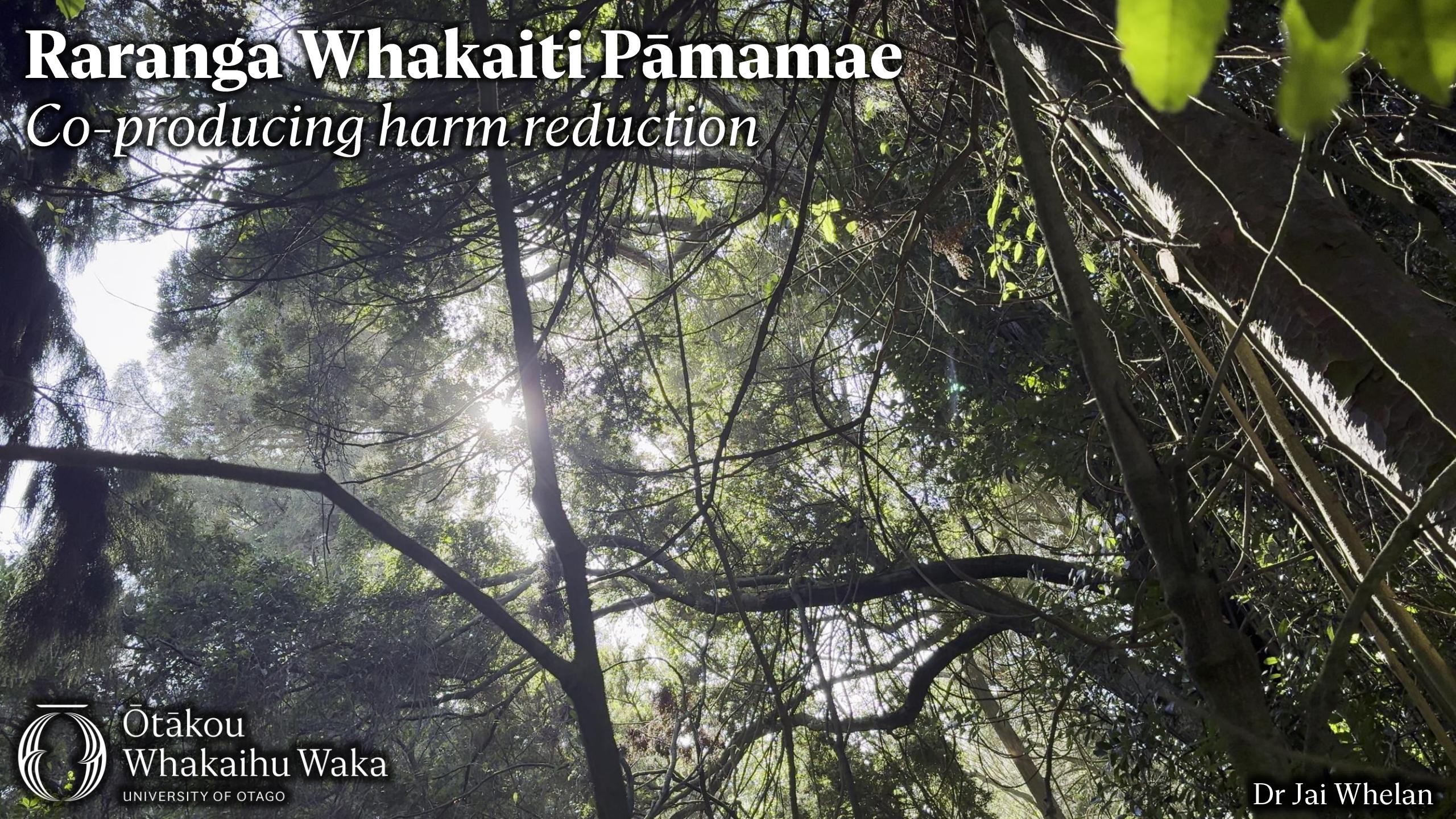


Raranga Whakaiti Pāmamae

Co-producing harm reduction



Ōtākou
Whakaihu Waka
UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

Dr Jai Whelan

What would drug harm reduction
research / science / communication
look like if it was co-led by the people it is
meant to protect?

Harm Reduction

“...policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise the negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws”

- Harm Reduction International



For indigenous harm reduction... “Harm must be addressed in relation to the intersection between an individual, their choices, their history, the land, the spiritual domain and the community”

- McLachlan & Waitoki, 2022

Prohibition is a tool of colonial oppression

We are stuck trying to “make prohibition safer”

Obvious tension within Government entities

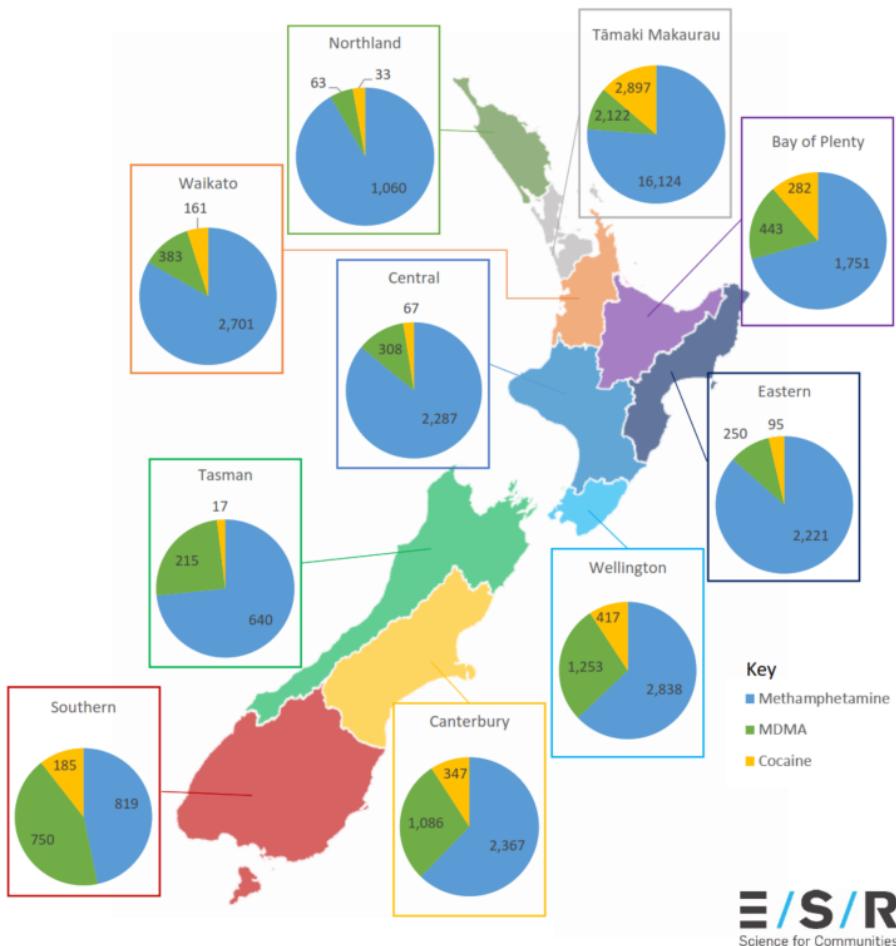
Prohibition ultimately restricts our ability to act
on scientific and community insights

Ōku whakaaro...

Communication

- Information is a basis for healthy self-determination
- Data means little when not communicated in accessible and respectful way
 - Translation of science often difficult
 - *Experience-informed* communication
 - E.g. How can we maximise the value of drug alerts?
(e.g. Brien et al., 2023; Siefried et al., 2025; Soukup-Baljak et al., 2015; Volpe et al., 2023)

AVERAGE WEEKLY DRUG USE BY DISTRICT SITES Q1 2025 (GRAMS)



Source: New Zealand Police, 2025

Ultrasensitive paper-based fluorescent sensors for detecting liquid illicit drugs

Public statement

There has been a dramatic increase in the volume of Fantasy-type drugs in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past few years. These are dangerous and harmful drugs, often used as 'date rape' drugs. They are difficult to detect with currently available methods.

Source: MBIE, 2024

Types of stimulants

Common stimulants are those based on amphetamines like methamphetamine (ice, crystal meth, P). These are very different from the prescribed amphetamine Ritalin, which healthcare providers use to treat ADHD.

Long term, you may have flashbacks. These can happen at any time after taking the drug. Taking other drugs can trigger them, as well as fatigue or heavy exercise.

Source: Health New Zealand, 2025

Communication

- We create “facts” through our communications – articles, media, training, policy (e.g. Moore & Fraser, 2015)
 - Mis/disinformation historically used to oppress
- More *positive framing* as the future?
 - People who use drugs care about more than just risk/harm
 - Promoting agency, research suggests
 - More openness & trust
 - Less defensiveness

Ecstasy

- No use is the safe choice.



Stigma

Whakaahua: Ongaonga (*Urtica ferox*), Jon Sullivan

Spreadsheets & Streets

- Complementary sources of knowledge are important
 - Surveillance data
 - Lived experience
 - Community observation
 - And beyond...
- Drug experience is *situated expertise*
 - “Being out there” – drug use environments
- Greater breadth of inputs/methods alongside “hard science” will maximise benefits

Community benefit

- Tension exists between care and control
 - Care: autonomy, trust, safety, transparency, empowerment, equity
 - Control: order, compliance, risk aversion, liability management
- Where are the opportunities? *e.g. expansion of drug checking*
 - “G-type” tests - continued repurposing of forensic tools (?)
 - More quantitative capacity – limited testing of pills
 - More mobility
- Sharing data *meaningfully* with community
 - Tension in surveillance– even in harm reduction (Michaud et al., 2023)
- **Advocacy from inside – shift bureaucratic/legal barriers**

Whakakapi

- Scientists and community should walk alongside each other
- Valuable and accessible communication of information is critical
- *Care* over control
- Not surveillance – *service*
- *Relationships* built on *trust* are the foundation



Whakaahua: Kahukura (*Vanessa gonerilla*)
on ongaonga, Jon Sullivan

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