



**Association pour la Défense des Droits et
l'Inclusion des personnes qui Consomment
des drogues du Québec**

Guideline for the inclusion of drug users

**By L'ADDICQ, a project of the Québec Association for the Promotion of
Drug Users' Health (AQPSUD)**



May 16, 2012

Introduction

In 2011, the members of l'ADDICQ collectively carried out a task force on the mobilisation of drug users in all five regions where we are present in the province of Québec (Montréal, Québec, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Eastern Townships and Outaouais). We wrote an assessment from our observations to help better mobilize our members to be heard and to help them take position and take a stand for a better quality of life.

Since the inclusion of drug users is one of our main war horses, we came out with 11 recommendations to help the inclusion of drug users in community organisms and other service instances. These recommendations will, at least we hope, help the persons interested in including drug users so we can work together to promote health and provide services adapted to their needs.

1st Recommendation: Give us the means

Drug users are the ones who are best placed to talk about their reality and find answers adapted to their needs. But if we want them to participate in our discussions and decisions on those services and other concerns, we have to allow them to do so.

That is why our 1st recommendation is to give drug users the means to take their place, but without taking them by the hand and do it for them.

This implies:

- to be clear on the goals of our meetings and the process in which we embark;
- that the guidelines are clear, understood and respected;
- to be sure that the information is available, accessible and that people know where to find it;
- that we are well informed before meetings;
- to take time to explain and vulgarize;
- to give classes to learn the different aspects of participating in committees (writing PVs, animation, discussions and decision making, etc.)
- to provide access to different resources (computers, agendas, bus tickets, calling cards, etc.

2nd Recommendation : Do not pretend

If we want to include, it is important to do it fully. There is nothing more frustrating than having the impression that we are there just to be "cute" and that our opinion is not sought, not listened to and not taken seriously.

That is why our 2nd recommendation is : Do not just pretend to include us.

This implies:

- to explain clearly the goals of including drug users in committees;
- to give room to everyone and encourage participants to take a stand;
- to listen well and consider what is said;
- and, mostly, not involve drug users for nothing, PLEASE !

3rd Recommendation: Keep it simple !

If we want drug users to take part in committees and other instances, it is important to not complicate matters more than they already are.

That is why our 3rd recommendation is simple: Keep it simple !

This implies:

- that meetings should not be too long and too formal;
- to have breaks and predetermined end times;
- to be well prepared to insure that time is well spent and that we will not lose some attendants !

4th Recommendation: Adapt our way of doing things

We often live in precarious conditions, so if we want to include us, you must change the framework commonly used.

That is why our 4th recommendation is: Adapt our ways to the reality of drug users.

This implies:

- to use the phone instead of using e-mails since it is not always easy to access to the internet;
- reach us where we are (ex: community organisms, the street, etc);

- customize your approach to better reach us.

5th Recommendation: Two is better !

Because of a lot of factors, it may happen that we could not attend a meeting at which we had pledged to go. That is why we should try to avoid giving all the information and all the responsibilities to only one person. Indeed, we must not overload people who are very involved so they will stay with us longer and, at the same time, allow other persons to participate. Finally, having two drug users present will make them feel more at ease with other participants.

That is why our 5th recommendation is: Always invite at least 2 drug users to a committee or a meeting.

6th Recommendation: Emphasize good deeds

It is always good to know that what we did was appreciated and that it is worth to continue to get involved. Moreover, some encouragement makes us feel good, especially when we are often badmouthed and rejected.

That is why our 6th recommendation is: Highlight the accomplishments, achievements and success of inclusion.

It is important to remember our brothers and sisters who have left us, to remember their contribution to help us go on.

7th Recommendation: Do practical things

It is nice to get together, to share information and ideas, to find solutions to our problems, but if those meetings are not followed by some actions, we loose interest and that does not encourage us to get involved. Also, these meetings not being necessarily the most exciting part of promoting health and better our life circumstances and being aware that we like strong emotions must not discourage us to express ourselves, since we are the ones with problems we are trying to solve!

That is why our 7th recommendation is: Do practical things, not only meetings.

8th Recommendation: Thoroughly train caregivers to support inclusion

To support inclusion, we need allies aware of our realities and comfortable working with us. We already have to deal with prejudice from the population and that makes us impatient sometime, but we want people who work with us to be aware of our problems and continue to support our mandates.

That is why our 8th recommendation is: Good training for our caregivers to support inclusion.

9th Recommendation: Recognize our expertise

We are experts of our reality, and that is why we are asked to participate in many committees and why we want to be invited. Since we are the main stakeholders, we are mostly the ones who are best suited to talk about our reality and find solutions to problems. But as we said, we want more than just be present around a table.

That is why our 9th recommendation is: Recognize our expertise.

This implies:

- to invite us not only to focus groups;
- to have enough confidence in us to do more than give an opinion (ex: give us the means to execute different tasks, integrate us in group workshops, let us work in committees from start to finish, etc.).

10th Recommendation: Compensate us for our time

We are the experts, but we often are the only ones around a table who are not paid. Yet, we also have fundamental needs, and still we are not paid when we sit on a committee. Sometimes, people are uncomfortable to pay drug users, fearing that they will use the money to buy drugs. But are we questioning how salaried persons spend their pay. And should we ? We do not think so, and you should not either.

That is why our 10th recommendation is: Compensate us for our time.

This implies:

- Offer us some money, food or anything useful to compensate us for our time.

11th Recommendation: Support l'ADDICQ to support inclusion.

To support the inclusion of drug users, it must be acknowledged that there is an organisation in Québec which has a mandate to include and to help you work with us.

That is why our 11th recommendation is: Support l'ADDICQ to support inclusion.

This implies:

- financial support;
- acknowledging the importance of l'ADDICQ's role in supporting the inclusion of drug users.

To conclude:

It is important that people understand that at l'ADDICQ, we work for the inclusion of all drug users and not only our members. Since we are more than 300 members in different regions of Québec, we are well placed to support the community organisms and other instances who want to include drug users into their committees. Although the inclusion of drug users sometimes upsets ways and takes some effort, we are convinced that it is an investment that can only be beneficial for everyone.

At l'ADDICQ, we are not here to put a spoke in the wheels of the people who provide services to us, but rather to help them ensure that their services are well suited to our needs. All together, we can work to improve the lives of people who use drugs and that we are truly recognized as full citizens, to make our society more inclusive and fair!

