



# CITY OF TSHWANE

## A 'network governance' approach to community substance use

The Community Oriented Substance Use Programme (COSUP) is an evidence-based, community-oriented programme, which provides substance-use health and care services to local communities in the greater Tshwane area. Designed and implemented through a core partnership between the City of Tshwane, the University of Pretoria and local communities, the multi-disciplinary programme operates through a network of co-created partnerships with a broad spectrum of actors. Delving into the working arrangements between these various actors and their evolution over time provides the lens for exploring the power of cooperative governance across the service delivery value chain.



### OVERVIEW

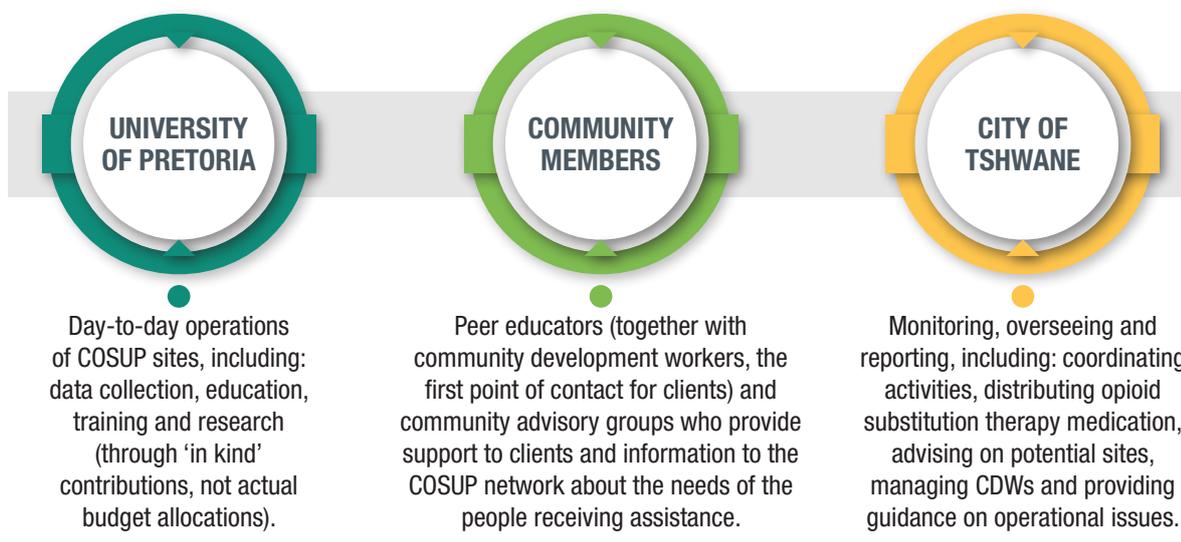
A rise in substance use places services (health, police, homeless shelters) under pressure and undermines social cohesion. Anecdotal evidence had shown an increase in heroin trafficking, drug availability and drug-related treatment admissions in Tshwane, which was of concern to both politicians and city health officials. Building on Tshwane's role as South Africa's research and development hub and government centre and the strategic pillars set out in its "Tshwane 2030 vision" the City set out to find a practical, accessible, affordable and science-based response to the reduction of the incidence of drug dependency and its burden on society. This led to the establishment of the Community Oriented Substance Use Programme (COSUP) in 2015, through a partnership between the City of Tshwane, the University of Pretoria and local communities. Connected by a common purpose and intention, the COSUP partnership was successfully rolled out in the following years in collaboration with a co-created network of government and societal actors. COSUP's strengths and versatility were brought to the fore when the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a country-wide lockdown. In 2020, the COSUP network was extended for another three years.

## The co-creation of COSUP

Health officials and politicians in the City of Tshwane were concerned about the rise in drug use in the city and its negative repercussions for people’s wellbeing. In May 2015, this concern caused the Mayoral Committee (Mayco) to ask the Department of Health and Social Development (DHSD) for a targeted evidence-based programme to address drug and substance use in communities. As the city had a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the University of Pretoria (UP), health officials approached the university to conduct an analysis of drug and substance use in the city. Based on the research findings, the DHSD requested UP to submit a proposal for an evidence-based, harm-reduction approach to substance abuse, which was done in November and approved by Mayco in December 2015. The city then signed a service level agreement (SLA) with UP for implementing COSUP in the greater Tshwane area. By mid-2019, COSUP had 17 functional and viable sites, including 12 drop-in centres where community members could access ablution facilities, food, computers, psycho-social services and safe spaces for socialising. Following this success, the COSUP intervention was extended for another three years from 1 July 2020.

## Network governance model

### CORE NETWORK PARTNERS



The COSUP uses a network governance model, which balances flexibility and agility and a ‘containing structure’, in which each core network partner fulfils its own role. The City of Tshwane is responsible for programmatic monitoring, oversight and reporting, and managing the community development workers (CDWs) who support COSUP sites. UP is responsible for the day-to-day operation of COSUP sites, which includes site support (e.g., data collection) and oversight, education, research and training activities. Community engagement is ingrained in the COSUP organisational DNA, based on the ‘nothing about us without us’ mantra and collaboration with peer educators and community advisory groups. The core COSUP network partners collaborate with a broad spectrum of actors and institutions, while organisations in the network share resources (e.g., information, skills), provide training and referrals, and debate ideas for creative problem-solving. Linkages are encouraged among the homeless, sex workers, law enforcement, substance users and service providers in healthcare, education, skills development and mental health. Other key partners include the provincial health department, national and provincial social development departments, the Central Drug Authority, ward councillors, regional drug action committees and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). COSUP governance practices reflect the four hallmark features of a network governance model: reciprocal



interdependence, as members have a strong and common goal that can be attained only through working together; a high level of mutual trust and respect, regular communication and commitment; a horizontal structure of interdependent actors who have operational autonomy and share power; and a self-regulating system in which decisions are negotiated by the network.

## COSUP, the homeless and COVID-19

COSUP's strengths and versatility were brought to the fore when the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a country-wide lockdown, which meant that the city had to accommodate all homeless people. Recognising the need for skilled people to treat homeless people who were substances users and would go into withdrawal with no access to drugs, the city asked COSUP to assist. The experience highlighted the value of the partnership between the city, UP and other actors. Everyone knew each other, which made it easier for all the teams to work together and provide services to shelters and other places of safety. Partners provided resources, which meant that resources did not have to be taken from city clinics. Almost double the usual number of clients were assisted with withdrawal and associated health issues. The overriding lesson was that being in a safe and stable environment makes it easier for substance users to access multifaceted services, thus improving retention.



## GOVERNANCE INSIGHTS

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### Network governance can enhance state capability

A capable state is one that is well organised, resourced and competent. The City of Tshwane displays most of these characteristics, with a dedicated core team of officials who have a deep understanding of the city's socioeconomic challenges, as reflected in the five strategic pillars that underpin the Tshwane 2030 vision. However, City officials also realised that drug use is a complex social issue with multiple causes and impacts and that achieving its strategic objectives demanded a high level of resources, specialised skills and knowledge. This insight motivated officials and politicians to co-create a network of partners to deliver a targeted community-orientated drug use programme. COSUP's success has helped people overcome their initial aversion to a harm-reduction approach, and the demand for COSUP services is currently greater than the programme's capacity. The Tshwane story highlights how the municipality's ability to initiate, establish and participate in cross-sectoral partnerships and programme implementation has enhanced its capacity to deliver services. COVID-19 brought to the fore the value of a network governance model as the existing multi-disciplinary engagement between the City and its partners allowed teams to work together and continue providing services, thereby meeting the expectations of citizens.

### The importance of clear roles and responsibilities for effective collaboration

COSUP works because the partners have clear roles and responsibilities. All partners agree that COSUP is a city initiative. It is supported by both the political and administrative arms of local government, with officials guiding and monitoring the programme's implementation in line with the city's strategic objectives. The UP provides specialist knowledge and skills and assists in building a strong evidence base. Community members are active players in the programme and are essential for building trust with beneficiaries and referring them to COSUP's services. Active community engagement builds mutual trust and respect, gives meaning to the adage 'nothing about us without us', and enables interventions to be redefined and adjusted to respond to local conditions. NGOs are also involved in delivering the programme, although COSUP recognises the need to include them more. It has also recognised the need for stronger intergovernmental collaboration between the City and provincial government.

## The power of an evidence-based approach during times of political change

COSUP takes a holistic, evidence-based ('practice with science'), harm-reduction approach to public health and is based on the principles of community-oriented primary care. A solid evidence base, combined with a cooperative approach, is crucial for getting support from all political parties, even when there are political changes in municipal leadership. At the start of COSUP, all political parties were fully informed of the project, enabling them to get support from their constituencies for the programme. This meant that, when the political administration changed, the new administration did not need convincing about the project, as they had supported it before they were in power. The evidence-based approach also contributed to a symbiosis between official and political role players, with the city's political and administrative components functioning as one in relation to COSUP. This illustrates the importance of both an evidence-based approach for a programme's long-term continuity, and a functioning political-administrative interface for enabling cooperative governance.

## LEARNINGS

### The strength of a dynamic implementing partnership

The COSUP partnership is flexible, agile and responsive to the implementing environment, facilitating collective dialogue, understanding, insight development, problem-solving and innovation. It is able to manoeuvre as needed through rapid, horizontal communication, has the required reach and resilience, can enable structured and evidence-based collaboration, and can learn and adapt. Flexibility and agility require a 'containing structure', but also a flexible working relationship in which roles and responsibilities of actors can morph. Therefore, an organisation needs to find the best balance between these seemingly opposing forces. A network governance model represents this balance, as existing relationships can bring partners on board efficiently and in a way that enables everyone to play to their strengths, while expanding their footprint.

### The role of university as intermediary

An intermediary, such as a university, comes with additional benefits, providing access to cutting-edge science, and having a reputation of being well-governed. The key advantage of using an intermediary organisation is that it instantly 'plugs' the city into a broader, existing and well-functioning system, which has a wide range of specialist professional, knowledge and infrastructure resources that can be used in delivering a programme such as COSUP. An intermediary such as UP also has connections to external knowledge resources, where they can showcase programme successes, learn from others, experiment with less conventional approaches, and learn from mistakes.

### The importance of integration with existing structures and processes

COSUP was designed based on building and capacitating existing structures in communities. Where possible, COSUP sites blend in with existing physical infrastructure, so that services are accessible to community members. The programme also operates within established city structures and processes, such as steering committees, task teams and oversight forums, while engaging with communities either through ward committee channels or NGOs. However, there is still scope for improving the programme's integration across sectors and with public primary healthcare facilities, and for extending its reach to vulnerable substance users in society, such as women.

