



Dr Jennifer Buckley
Committee Secretary
Northern Territory Parliament Select Committee on a Northern Territory Harm Reduction
Strategy for Addictive Behaviours

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Northern Territory Parliament Select Committee on a Northern Territory Harm Reduction Strategy for Addictive Behaviours.

It is important to establish at the start that no matter how strong our desire for people not to use drugs or our efforts at education and prevention, people will use drugs. This is not to undervalue drug education and prevention programs but rather to be realistic about their impact and the evidence of their effectiveness, particularly in the long-term. We know from numerous surveys that a large proportion of people in Australia use drugs at some time in their lives. The majority enjoy the experience and encounter little, if any adverse effects. However, for too many people the illegality of the drugs will significantly raise the potential for many unnecessary harms.

It is imperative to understand that first and foremost, all of us want those we care for and who may be using drugs, not to be harmed.

Criminal convictions for drug use can leave ongoing and permanent stains on people's lives. They can put an end to career prospects and severely restrict overseas travel. In the end it is the young and the poor that disproportionately bear this burden.

When we do tackle the problems associated with some drug use we should also emphasise the health, well-being and human rights of the person using drugs and focus on supporting them and their families, not use it as an opportunity to punish.

In relation to the Inquiry's specific Terms of Reference we have provided a number of relevant articles and documents as attachment (links) and the end of this correspondence as part of our submission. Quite simply we believe there are a number of evidence based opportunities for the Northern Territory to reform its law, policy and practice to help save lives and protect individuals, families and communities from drug related harms.

The rapidly changing nature of drug production, availability, distribution and use requires an agile and evidence focussed response.

Accordingly, based on the growing body of evidence available we call on the following policies and programs to be introduced as a matter of urgency.

- Decriminalisation of personal drug use, along with possession for personal use, to address the significant long term health, financial and social harm that is caused by arresting and convicting (and incarcerating in some cases) people who use drugs;
- Significantly increasing the level of funding for drug harm reduction and demand reduction services, particularly given the substantial imbalance to the level of funding provided to law enforcement for supply reduction activities;
- The need for a much greater level of engagement and consultation with people who use drugs in the development of policy and program responses;
- The need for comprehensive harm reduction services across the territory that provide information, education, needle and syringe programs, pill (drug) testing and supervised injecting facilities, as appropriate and required;
- The need for pill testing to be available at music festivals and venues, including the immediate cessation on the use of sniffer dogs at these events and venues;
- The need for heroin prescription programs to attract currently non-engaged heroin users into the treatment network;
- Greater support for evidence based residential and non-residential treatment services;
- Greater support for families that is ongoing and focused on their needs; and
- Greater use of non-custodial sentencing options and investment in justice reinvestment strategies – see <http://www.justreinvest.org.au/>

In addition to the information provided it is important to note that in regard to the 3rd term of reference, there are numerous reports available on international best practices. Countries such as Portugal, Switzerland, Canada and others, can provide a wealth of detail and evidence for policies and practices that are both effective and efficient in their results to reduce drug related harm.

As a final note, we reiterate that saving lives of should be paramount. Policies and practices to reduce harm, treat drug use and support people and families in our communities are meaningless when the person has died as a result of policies that increase harm.

Please do not hesitate to contact HRA should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Mr Gino Vumbaca
President
Harm Reduction Australia
28 August 2018

HRA Attachments for Further Information

<https://johnmenadue.com/gino-vumbaca-drug-reform-series-at-last-a-government-sanctioned-pill-testing-program/>

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/drug-users-shouldnt-be-treated-like-criminals/news-story/f1fd08e21c86861aa10e99686e8fc96f>

<https://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Pill-Testing-Pilot-ACT-June-2018-Final-Report.pdf>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/tony-trimmingham/your-kids-on-ice-what-to-do-next/>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/tony-trimmingham/we-need-to-say-know-to-drugs/>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/tony-trimmingham/harm-reduction-the-key-to-drugs-policy/>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/gino-vumbaca/we-should-just-say-no-to-australias-approach-to-drugs/>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/gino-vumbaca/its-time-to-face-the-music-on-australias-flawed-drug-policy/>

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/the-war-on-drugs-is-a-war-against-our-own-children-friends-and-families-20151125-gl7kkl.html>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/gino-vumbaca/the-war-on-drugs-has-become-an-embarrassment-of-orwellian-proportions_b_9233694.html

http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/gino-vumbaca/health-warnings-on-drugs-shouldnt-be-provided-by-police/?utm_hp_ref=au-homepage