



Professor Dan Howard SC
Commissioner
Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'
C/- GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Prof Howard SC

Thank you for providing Harm Reduction Australia (HRA) with the opportunity to provide some input into your Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'.

As we are sure you would be aware, there are already a number of recent reports and papers available on the issue of 'ice' in Australia and internationally. Accordingly, rather than repeat the findings that already exist, HRA will focus on only two key issues it firmly believes should be addressed by your new Commission of Inquiry. There are:

1. The lack of investment and development of programs designed to reduce the harm from 'ice' and other drugs.

The commitment of funds to actually reduce the levels of harm experienced by people who use 'ice', as well as those for their friends, families and the wider community, can only be described as pitiful. There are many programs that can offer assistance to people who are using 'ice' including pill testing services, peer support programs, needle and syringe programs family support programs and drug consumption rooms.

There is also the opportunity for NSW to embark on the development of new programs designed to reduce harm. For example, the trialling of Triage Rooms for intoxicated people who use 'ice' as well as other drugs, would provide a much safer and appropriate environment for many people including staff and patients at hospital emergency departments. A briefing paper is attached for your information, however, as some of the details of this paper are still currently in development it is provided to you on a confidential basis and not for wider circulation, at this stage.

2. The mismatch between statements of concern about 'ice' use and the allocation of health based funding.

Too often we have seen senior decision makers at a political and bureaucratic level refer to the most severe cases of 'ice' use, and then announce funding which is clearly aimed at those with at worst, moderate and mild drug use issues.

For example, of the current additional Federal funding of \$300 million provided in the response to the Ice Taskforce Report only a handful of new places at residential rehabilitation services (where many people with severe levels of dependency on 'ice' seek treatment) have been funded while the overwhelming share of the treatment funds has been for counselling services (where many people with mild or moderate levels of dependency on 'ice' seek assistance or treatment). Additionally, a disproportionate amount of the funding has been allocated for community committee meetings and education programs, with no funding allocated to any harm reduction services.

Of course, the continued over investment in law enforcement strategies and the criminal justice system to address drug use has a limited evidence base for effectiveness is also of great concern.

HRA firmly believes that it is clearly time for the funding commitments from governments to address the real concerns and impacts with 'ice' use in the community. We believe you should take this opportunity to highlight the need for more innovation for all drug policies, not just 'ice'. Quite simply, our drug policies need a radical overhaul.

We are hopeful that your Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice' will be able to have terms of reference and an open minded approach to examine all the evidence and issues and make appropriate recommendations – something that was unfortunately not possible in the most recent NSW Government drug taskforce exercise regarding music festival safety.

Please do not hesitate to contact HRA for further information and details on this submission.

Yours sincerely



Mr Gino Vumbaca
President
Harm Reduction Australia
11 January 2019