

## Submission Into Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Communications Campaigns Targeting Drug and Substance Abuse.

Lachlan Fitzgerald

This submission does not reflect the views of any organization. It is my personal opinion.

My name is Lachlan Fitzgerald and I am writing to this inquiry as preventative health is something that I have taken a particular interest in. As a young person I believe that I have a unique perspective as the target of a number of these campaigns as well as someone who has had friends suffer as a result of illicit substances and alcohol abuse. My name is Lachlan Fitzgerald, I am currently a student nurse at the University of Canberra as well as a volunteer to the P.A.R.T.Y program, a Canberra Hospital program aimed at reducing alcohol related harm and risk taking behaviour in young people.

I would like to focus my submission on the efficacy of the use of campaigns aimed at various audiences, including, but not limited to, children at an age before they would typically become illicit drug users and Indigenous communities. As well as identifying best practice approaches to designing and implementing campaigns, including social media, digital channels and traditional advertising.

Anti-drug education aimed at children younger than the age at which they typically become illicit drug users can be effective when it continues through into early adulthood. The Australian Curriculum has alcohol and other drugs as a focus area for Health and Physical Education from Year 3 onwards and that should remain in place. Good education allows informed choices to be made that reduce substance abuse. I believe that the majority of programs outside the classroom should be targeted at adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 rather than children younger than that. When it comes to making the choice of whether or not to use potentially harmful substances, it is better that young people have been subject to anti-drug campaigns recently as well as the education that is currently part of the national Health and Physical Education Curriculum. It is a better use of government resources to target older adolescents than children below the age of 15 to illicit substances.

I would like to mention a program that helped me and that I was a volunteer for that I believe we can take important lessons from to influence drug programs. The PARTY program has input from nurses, trauma specialists, allied health professionals and survivors. People who have been directly affected by misuse of illicit drugs and alcohol have a unique perspective and can affect change in attitudes and ultimately decisions in students. A study conducted in Ontario, Canada by Joanne Banfield between 1993 and 2002 showed that participants in the PARTY program had a lower rate of traumatic injury as well as less severity, after controlling for age, gender and residential area. It is important that the government utilize the experiences and input of healthcare professionals and survivors in order to give young people a better idea around the potential consequences of their decisions.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities I would hope that the government remains committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of solutions. I believe that this has had a positive effect on the reduction of smoking, illicit drug use and risky

drinking behaviours in those populations. Anti-drug campaigns are best targeted at adolescents and this is not different in the indigenous community. Community leaders and Indigenous role models need to continue to be involved for these programs to be successful. Not taking cultural sensitivities into account will lead to these programs being ineffective. It should be largely the same message, but delivered with input from community leaders, with necessary changes made for cultural differences.

Mass media campaigns have a lack of efficacy for illicit drug campaigns, with many showing very little or no effect on illicit drug use. A meta-analysis of randomized studies conducted by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) found no effect on reduction of use of illicit substances and only a weak effect on intention to use.

Mass media campaigns have shown effects in other areas of community health including areas of substance abuse, such as in drink driving deaths. Drink driving deaths have seen a significant reduction and a massive change in community attitudes with effective mass media campaigns. Smoking has also seen a large decrease and change in community attitudes because of mass media campaigns among anti-smoking legislation.

Illicit drug programs should be targeted towards older secondary school aged adolescents. They need to use input from health professionals and survivors as these people can best outline the consequences of substance abuse. These programs need to be altered for indigenous communities with help from community leaders, however the overall message should be the same. Mass media campaigns on illicit drugs would not be a wise use of resources, instead these mass media campaigns should focus on issues such as alcohol abuse and smoking, where they have proven effectiveness in Australia.

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to make this submission.