



## Submission to

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement:

# Inquiry into public communication campaigns targeting drug and substance abuse

Drug Education Network

January 2020



## Background - The Drug Education Network

The Drug Education Network (DEN) is a non-government organisation funded to deliver a range of health promotion, prevention, and early intervention programs to reduce the harm associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) use across Tasmania. We have a commitment to deliver services focused on community engagement and capacity building.

DEN recognises socio-economic, cultural and gender factors influence usage and that disadvantage is often perpetuated through different system and service responses to different population groups.

Therefore, DEN works closely with communities and key stakeholders to identify and develop locally owned responses to concerns regarding alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. Recognising that ATOD use and misuse affects individuals across the lifespan, DEN works from pre-birth to the senior years.

DEN works right across the preventive health continuum and has been nominated as the Lead Agency to support the implementation of *Everybody's Business* the Plan for Implementing Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Approaches in Averting Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs. Accordingly, DEN is supporting the implementation of initiatives across government agencies and public, private and community sector providers in accordance with the *Everybody's Business Strategic Framework*.

DEN welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement's Inquiry into public communication campaigns targeting drug and substance abuse. We applaud the intention of this Inquiry to develop prevention-focused strategies that can be achieved through public communication campaigns and recognise that there is some work to be done in the improvement of this approach to maximise effective outcomes.

## DEN responses to the inquiry into public communication campaigns targeting drug and substance abuse terms of reference

### a) the efficacy of different approaches to such campaigns

Public communication campaigns are a powerful means for disseminating health promotion messages. A wide and diverse audience can be reached through television commercials, the Internet, mobile phones, newspapers and roadside advertising hoardings. In the field of drug addiction and dependence, these communication methods, at the very least, raise awareness and provide factual, evidence-based information on drugs, drug use and its potential health, social and economic consequences. Even where no significant change in drug use or intention to use is demonstrated, studies show that recall of campaigns is high and that they can have an impact on knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about substance use.

One of the main issues regarding the efficacy of public communications campaigns is that they are seldom evaluated, making it difficult to provide accurate and clear evidence of their effectiveness and sustainability. However, mass-media campaigns tackling tobacco and alcohol consumption (particularly with relation to drink driving) have been evaluated more frequently and have shown evidence for benefit.

In a 2015 systematic review of randomised and nonrandomised studies to determine whether there is evidence that mass-media campaigns can be effective in reducing illicit drug consumption and the intent to consume 19 studies comprising 184, 811 participants were identified. The analysis of these studies provided mixed evidence of effectiveness. Eight interventions evaluated with randomised controlled trials leaned towards no evidence of an effect, both on drug use and the intention to use drugs. Four campaigns provided some evidence of beneficial effects in preventing drug use and two interventions provided evidence of iatrogenic effects.

The authors of the study, Allara *et al*, noted that “The evidence base accrued so far on media campaigns targeting illicit drugs allows us to make at least two remarks. First, such campaigns can be evaluated—a fact that is often questioned in several parts of the world—and properly conducted evaluation studies can provide benefits to both research and practice. Second, in the worst-case scenario, media campaigns can be both ineffective and harmful. Contrary to common belief, anti-drug media campaigns may be damaging and their dissemination is ethically unacceptable without a prior assessment of their effects. New campaigns should be implemented in the framework of rigorous evaluation studies, ideally in field settings with cohort or ITS study designs [Interrupted Time Series Design – more on this in the evaluation response in section b]. A better understanding of which media interventions work best is likely to result in

a more effective prevention of drug use and increased efficiency in the management of public resources.”<sup>1</sup>

In their review, Allara *et al* found that two mass media campaigns showed clear iatrogenic effects, most notably, the first version of the US Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) media campaign My Anti Drug, which was evaluated by two studies and was found to increase the use of marijuana. My Anti Drug was based on a social marketing approach which emphasised resistance skills, self-efficacy, normative education and negative consequences of drug use. An adverse effect was also found for a media community intervention evaluated by a controlled before and after (CBA) study, which provided evidence of the increased frequency of LSD use.

It is worth noting that two out of the four interventions provide evidence of effectiveness, the ONDCP’s Above the Influence national campaign and the Be Under Your Own Influence media-community intervention promoted non-use of drugs as a way to support the goals of autonomy and achievement of competence, both of which have been conceptualised as innate psychological needs that persist over the lifespan.

This review is not by means the only study to draw the same conclusions. In general, therefore, DEN can confidently state that:

- All communication campaigns must be evaluated
- New campaigns should be implemented in the framework of rigorous evaluation studies, ideally in field settings with cohort or ITS study designs.

## i. 'shock advertising', informational campaigns and the use of social marketing

### Shock campaigns

It may seem that fear-based appeals are persuasive, but it is also clear that they run the risk of stigmatising people who use substances and have been found to do little to help people modify their behaviours in the interests of bettering their health. It is commonly thought that shock advertising works by eliciting fear or disgust and by using messages that provoke scorn, shaming and humiliation. J Keith Simpson of Murdoch University’s School of Psychology and Exercise Science reviewed the research on shock tactics and found that “As a marketing ploy, appeal to fear has an intuitive appeal, but paradoxically the outcomes are often ineffective or counterproductive rendering it at best an equivocal tool for changing behaviours.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elias Allara *et al* (2015), Are mass-media campaigns effective in preventing drug use? A Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis, *BMJ Open*; Vol 5, no. 9, doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014007449

<sup>2</sup> J Keith Simpson (2017), Appeal to fear in health care: appropriate or inappropriate? *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies*, Volume 25, no. 27, doi 10.1186/s12998-017-0157-8

Deborah Lupton has noted that “Evaluations of the effectiveness of confronting emotional appeals are equivocal. Many researchers have concluded that ‘graphic imagery,’ including disgust-inducing images, can be effective in conveying the main messages of the campaigns and evoke feelings of discomfort, revulsion and shock in target audiences about the risks posed by behaviours such as cigarette smoking, excessive alcohol use, illicit drug use and overeating.” She affirms that given the nature of the images used, these campaigns are successful in capturing the attention of the audience and that this is viewed as evidence for the success of these kinds of campaigns. Nonetheless, there is little clear evidence clear of shocking imagery and texts influencing sustained behaviour change. Lupton finds that “some studies have suggested that these images and texts may have the unintended and counterproductive effect of causing target audiences to avoid the confronting messages by responding with perceptual and cognitive defence mechanisms – in effect engaging in avoidance or denial that the risk affects them or a fatalistic acceptance of risk.”<sup>3</sup>

Lupton also refers to the ethical, moral and political implications of using these tactics. DEN agrees it cannot be said these are appropriate and just interventions if they use disgust, fear and shame, often provoking anger and contempt for those who are portrayed as weak and as ‘other’ for the promotion of public health.

Ishmeal Bradley reminds us that. “The idea that shame may persuade problem drug users to seek treatment, rather than repel them from it, also needs to be considered....users may be able to insulate themselves from the stigmatisation of broader society by living within ‘user communities,’ where problem drug use, and the lifestyle that accompanies it, is the norm. It seems highly unlikely that shame is the force for good.”<sup>4</sup>

Other negative effects of shock campaigns include:

- They may target and further stigmatise already politically and socially disenfranchised communities.
- Inundating these communities with fear about their lifestyle choices, coupled with a lack of means to make fundamental changes and improvement, is far from ethical.
- With each viewing of a negative ad, the viewer experiences less shock and emotional appeal. “In 2004, one research group in Australia and New Zealand studied this phenomenon with regards to fear-based advertising in preventing reckless driving.<sup>5</sup> They found that “participants indicated growing tired of such negative appeals and feeling numbed to ‘shock tactic advertising, basically

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Lupton (2015), The pedagogy of disgust: the ethical, moral and political implications of using disgust in public health campaigns, *Critical Public Health*, Volume 25, no.1, pp. 4-14, doi: 10.1080/09581596.2014.885115

<sup>4</sup> Ishmeal Bradley (2011), Ethical Considerations on The Use of Fear In Public Health Campaigns, <https://www.clinicalcorrelations.org/2011/11/23/ethical-considerations-on-the-use-of-fear-in-public-health-campaigns/>

<sup>5</sup> Ioni M Lewis, Barry Watson, Katherine M White (2007), Promoting Public Health Messages: Should We Move Beyond Fear-Evoking Appeals in Road Safety? *Qualitative Health Research.*, Volume 17, no. 1, pp. .61-74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230629639>

rendering the ads impotent. To grab the same level of attention, subsequent ads must be more shocking and jarring than the previous.”<sup>6</sup>

Given the potentially negative impacts of fear-based or shock campaigns and their serious political, moral, and ethical implications, DEN urges caution with the use of these interventions. Fear-based campaigns must tread a fine line between warning about health dangers and stigmatising those already affected by dangerous levels of substance use. It is also judicious to be aware that the evidence for their effectiveness is slight. Exaggeration of negative outcomes, in particular, has been shown to have little effect. Mass media campaigns are most effective when developed with coherent, credible, evidence-based messages grounded in behavioural science research. When it comes to anti-drug campaigns, truthful representations are the best way to go. There's a fine line between conveying the risks and exaggerating the dangers of drugs.

## Social Media Campaigns

Social media has gone from strength to strength in terms of user numbers. Current statistics<sup>7</sup> show that worldwide, 2271 million people use Facebook, 326 million Twitter, 1000 million Instagram, and 287 million use Snapchat. As a result, public health campaigns increasingly compete for people's attention and seek to influence their behaviour through these social media channels. But this requires continually adapting to trends.<sup>8</sup> Instagram and Snapchat have become the social media of choice for young people and people of all ages are increasingly using smart phones to receive information.

Social media users in Australia are some of the most active in the world, with a total of around 60% of the country's population an active user on Facebook and 50% of the country logging onto Facebook at least once a day.<sup>9</sup> The use of Facebook in Australia is dominated by 25 to 34-year-old millennials, with around 4.4 million Australians in this age bracket using the social networking site in 2018. Despite this, younger millennials are tending to use Facebook less than older generations, with a usage rate of around 70 percent in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

One review found that, on the whole, “overall effects of social marketing campaigns tend to be small. And that the evidence for social marketing campaigns for harmful substance use is unclear, as studies often only examine their impact on short-term outcomes.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ishmeal Bradley (2011)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/

<sup>8</sup> Crispin Butteriss & Jonathan Bradley (2019), *Bang the table: The world's best public health social media campaigns*, <https://www.bangthetable.com/blog/public-health-social-media-campaigns/>

<sup>9</sup> Social Media Statistics Australia (2019), *Social Media News*, <https://www.socialmedianews.com.au/social-media-statistics-australia-january-2019/>

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Hughes, (2019), Breakdown of Facebook users in Australia as of January 2018, by age group. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/680581/australia-facebook-users-by-age/>

<sup>11</sup> Social Marketing & Substance Use (2015), Northhampton England, The Society for the Study of Addiction, First published: July 22, 2015 | Last updated: August 4th, 2019, <https://www.addiction-ssa.org/knowledge-hub/social-marketing-substance-use/>

It is interesting to note that there are quite a few studies that find successful anti-tobacco and anti-drinking campaigns as opposed to successful anti-drug campaigns. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction has noted that “Campaigns have been successfully applied to the reduction of tobacco use and the promotion of road safety, and have shown moderately positive results in a number of areas including; the promotion of healthier nutrition, physical activity, participation in screening for breast and cervical cancer, organ donation and pre-hospital response times for potential heart attack symptoms.”<sup>12</sup> It could be worthwhile to examine why on the whole mass media campaigns of all types work for anti-smoking messages and not for anti-drug messages.

Overall there is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of social marketing campaigns for harmful substance use, although there is a much larger body of research for the impact of social marketing for wider healthcare issues. Targeting harmful substance use through social marketing is a challenge and many campaigns have failed; people are influenced in subtle and complex ways through a combination of cognitive processes and attitude changes that are not fully understood. Future work may begin to unravel these nuances further, but we are a long way from developing a reliable method for delivering infallible social marketing campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

However, one social media campaign that is showing promise is the “Above the Influence” (ATI) drug and alcohol prevention campaign, formerly funded through US federal money, but which has now shifted from expensive television ads to lower-cost digital and social media campaigns.<sup>14</sup> The campaign now concentrates on reaching teens where they spend time, such as Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook. There is evidence of effectiveness for this campaign, with two independent research studies that show that youth exposed to the ATI campaign are less likely to initiate/use.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the effectiveness of this campaign is a result of the designers taking “a different approach toward teens, in a way that has proven far more effective than the more traditional, negative anti-drug messages that the young people of today largely ignore or even make fun of. They have taken into account that young people are difficult to reach with traditional messages and that “they don’t like to be lectured or told what not to do and they don’t worry about their mortality.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the NSW Government’s Stoner Sloth campaign is one example of a social media failure. The campaign used videos, Gifs, social media, and a dedicated Tumblr hub to showcase the impacts of

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<sup>12</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013), Mass media campaigns for the prevention of drug use in young people, Perspectives on Drugs, <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/pods/mass-media-campaigns>

<sup>13</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013)

<sup>14</sup> Teen-Targeted Substance Abuse Prevention Campaign Focuses on Digital, Social Media (2013), <https://drugfree.org/learn/drug-and-alcohol-news/teen-targeted-substance-abuse-prevention-campaign-focuses-on-digital-social-media/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.reclaimingfutures.org/sites/default/files/documents/Reclaiming\\_Futures\\_ATI\\_Presentation\\_12\\_14\\_11\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.reclaimingfutures.org/sites/default/files/documents/Reclaiming_Futures_ATI_Presentation_12_14_11_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://drugfree.org/learn/drug-and-alcohol-news/teen-targeted-substance-abuse-prevention-campaign-focuses-on-digital-social-media/>



smoking marijuana, using the tagline “you're worse on weed.” The Stoner Sloth anti-marijuana campaign was parodied on YouTube, mocked on social media by young people and criticised by health experts.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the effectiveness of public communication campaigns to reduce the intention to use or cease using substances, DEN agrees that given the relatively lower cost of production (compared especially to TV advertising), these campaigns provide “greater visibility, personalization” and inform community through social networks to extend the reach of important conversations about addiction and recovery. This can only be a good thing.<sup>18</sup>

**ii. 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, Indigenous communities and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups**

Western Australian researchers Allom *et al* make the point that “lesbian, gay, and bisexual people...have been found to use online media more than TV. In addition, young people are an important group to target because of the particular need to discourage initiation at this stage of the lifecycle. Members of this age group engage less with live broadcast TV and spend a greater number of hours online in a typical week than older people. Mass media campaigns that utilize online platforms may, therefore, have the potential to reach target groups that may be less likely to frequently engage with TV. They also have the potential to encourage greater audience interaction with related online content.”<sup>19</sup>

There is little doubt that public communications drug prevention campaigns have been widely aimed at young people. These types of campaign typically target young people because evidence shows that drug use often starts during adolescence, a time in life when young people may experiment with cigarettes, alcohol and illicit drugs. In a report prepared for Everymind by the Priority Research Centre in Brain and Mental Health, University of Newcastle, the authors noted that “In 2010, it was estimated that young people spent 45 hours per week with media, across television, movies, video games, music, and websites; more time than was spent with parents (17 hours) or at school (30 hours). With the pervasiveness of technology into everyday living since that time, these numbers can only have increased. Media can reflect and impact the attitudes and beliefs of the general community, especially around sensitive issues like AOD use.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/nsw-governments-stoner-sloth-antimarijuana-campaign-cost-taxpayers-350000-20160218-gmxd8p.html>

<sup>18</sup> Kristina Robb-Dover (2017), How Social Media Is Changing the Conversation Surrounding Addiction, <https://www.adweek.com/digital/kristina-robb-dover-beach-house-center-for-recovery-guest-post-how-social-media-is-changing-the-conversation-surrounding-addiction/>

<sup>19</sup> Vanessa Allom et al (2018), Comparing the Cost-Effectiveness of Campaigns Delivered via Various Combinations of Television and Online Media, *Frontiers in Public Health*, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00083>

<sup>20</sup> Frances Kay-Lambkin., Sally Hunt, Jenny M M Geddes & Jayden Gilbert (2019), Evidence Check: Media Reporting of Alcohol and Other Drug Use, Newcastle, Everymind, .p 8, [https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/mindframemedia/assets/src/uploads/Evidence-Check-Media-Reporting-of-Alcohol-and-Other-Drug-Use-7.3.19\\_Final.pdf](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/mindframemedia/assets/src/uploads/Evidence-Check-Media-Reporting-of-Alcohol-and-Other-Drug-Use-7.3.19_Final.pdf)



The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction conducted a meta-analysis of studies that evaluated the effectiveness of mass media campaigns to influence drug use, intention to use, or the attitude towards illicit drugs of young people under the age of 26. "A search of the scientific literature found 23 studies, which involved around 200 000 young people and were conducted in Australia, Canada and the United States between 1991 and 2011. Only 14 of these met the criteria for inclusion in the meta-analysis. In summary, this meta-analysis of randomised studies found no effect on the reduction of use and a weak effect on the intention to use illicit substances. It also identified reports of possible unwanted effects in terms of young people declaring that they would like to try drugs...Reports of possible unwanted effects in terms of young people declaring that after having watched a media campaign, they were willing to try drugs raises concern."<sup>21</sup>

This review asserted that being informed might not have a direct effect on behavioural change and that perception of norms, e.g., the misperception by young people that all their peers are using drugs, may have an unintended impact. The authors make the point that, "Based on this review of the available evidence, it is recommended that such campaigns should only be provided in the context of rigorous, well-designed and well-powered evaluation studies."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the review points to research which has shown that some anti-drug messages can even lead to more drug use. It is recognised that adolescence is a period of developing more independence and autonomy. If drug use is perceived as a way to attain this, young people will not be easily discouraged from using drugs. An article by the English Society for the Study of Addiction refers to two major US social marketing campaigns aimed at young people which have failed to have a significant impact. These are "the \$1 billion National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign on Youths, which was aimed at education and prevention of drug use in the USA and was found to have no impact on marijuana use (examined by surveys of young people exposed to the campaign) and potential delayed unfavourable effects (marijuana use initiation).

Another example is the Montana Meth Project, where a major campaign produced statistically insignificant effects on methamphetamine use.<sup>23</sup> Indeed evaluations and expert commentary found that there was little evidence that the Montana Meth Project (MMP) made a significant difference. A report on the evaluation of the MMP found that a "2008 study published in *Prevention Science*, a peer-reviewed research journal, surveyed teenagers before and after exposure to the ads, and found a consensus among 50 percent of teenagers that the graphic ads exaggerate the drug's risks, and caused a threefold increase in the percentage of teens who believe that using meth is not risky. While scare tactics work on some teens, most rarely consider the long-term effects of drug use. Often, teens see no resemblance between the sore-covered addicts on MMP billboards and their friends or family members who use meth."<sup>24</sup> The author also

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<sup>21</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013), Can mass media campaigns prevent young people from using drugs? Lisbon, EMCDDA, <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/pods/mass-media-campaigns>

<sup>22</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2013)

<sup>23</sup> Social Marketing & Substance Use (2015), Northampton England, The Society for the Study of Addiction, First published: July 22, 2015 | Last updated: August 4th, 2019, <https://www.addiction-ssa.org/knowledge-hub/social-marketing-substance-use/>

<sup>24</sup> Lucy Tompkins (2016), Evaluating the effectiveness of the Montana Meth Project, [http://www.montanakaimin.com/news/evaluating-the-effectiveness-of-the-montana-meth-project/article\\_39f61954-ac5a-11e6-b695-bfd686efc470.html](http://www.montanakaimin.com/news/evaluating-the-effectiveness-of-the-montana-meth-project/article_39f61954-ac5a-11e6-b695-bfd686efc470.html)

noted that “Another 2010 study by D. Mark Anderson, assistant professor of economics at Montana State University, found little evidence that the MMP impacted meth use among high schoolers. The relationship between the Meth Project and meth use was generally small and statistically indistinguishable from zero,” the report concluded.”<sup>25</sup>

However, Tompkins does note that, in spite of questions regarding MMP’s success, it still attracts support from decision makers and health workers across the state of Montana and beyond, “who say it sparked dialogue about an often neglected issue...[and] started an important conversation about the dangers of meth use.”<sup>26</sup>

A study evaluating the efficacy of Above the Influence (ATI), a national media-based health persuasion campaign mentioned earlier in this submission, uses public service anti-drug prevention messages and targets youth between the ages of 14 and 16, a period of heightened susceptibility to peer influences. The authors of this study provide evidence of “positive campaign effects and may strengthen reliance on mass media health persuasion campaigns as a useful adjunct to other programs targeting youth.”<sup>27</sup>

DEN believes, based on available evidence and in various discussions in the course of our work with people from diverse groups, that engaging people in consultations about interventions that will impact on them is an important step in the development of effective campaigns.

### iii. international approaches

A search of the literature for campaigns undertaken in other countries shows some evidence of successful approaches. The English Society for the Study of Addiction review of social marketing and substance use nominated two successful campaigns as:

1. The Truth Initiative’s (previously the Legacy Foundation) Truth anti-smoking campaign in the USA which used television and online content to change social norms about smoking by countering the appeal of cigarettes through encouraging young people to rebel against the duplicity of the Tobacco Industry. Research suggests the campaign led to a 22% decrease in the prevalence of smoking in young people. In 2014 Truth launched *truth FinishIt*. An evaluation of this initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of brand equity in reducing self-reported tobacco use and in improving targeted anti-tobacco and related attitudes. The results of this study “suggest that building brand equity should be a target specifically for counter marketing campaigns, and generally for tobacco control programs seeking to change anti-tobacco attitudes.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lucy Tompkins (2016)

<sup>26</sup> Lucy Tompkins (2016)

<sup>27</sup> L M Scheier, J L Grenard, K D Holtz KD (2011), An empirical assessment of the Above the Influence advertising campaign, *Journal of Drug Education*, Volume 41, no. 4, pp. 431-61, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22455104>

<sup>28</sup> W Douglas Evans *et al* (2018), Effects of the *truth FinishIt* brand on tobacco outcomes, *Preventive Medicine Reports*, Volume 9 pp. 6–11, doi:[10.1016/j.pmedr.2017.11.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2017.11.008)

2. The UK, the Know Your Limits Campaign targeting awareness of sensible drinking in young adults, an examination of which suggests that a third of the audience reported the campaign messaging made them consider the negative consequences of getting drunk (Alcohol – Health Committee, 2010).

However, as previously noted, anti-smoking and sensible drinking campaigns (especially with regards to drink driving prevention) have been largely more effective than anti-drug campaigns. It is worth noting that there are new approaches to the latter which show promise. One of these is the Norwegian Association for Safer Drug Policies harm reduction campaign for 'Rusopplysningen' a “portal with accurate and science-based information about drugs without moralizing. By informing about the effects, risks and providing safety guidelines, we hope to minimise the harms of drug use.”<sup>29</sup>

## **b). research and evaluation methods used to plan, implement and assess the effects of such campaigns**

It is widely reported that relatively few drug prevention media campaigns have been formally evaluated and most of the evaluations which have been done have solely focused on assessing whether people understood and retained the main messages, and if they liked them. Where stronger evidence is available, it is rarely conclusive.

Allara *et al* posit that because “Contrary to common belief, anti-drug media campaigns may be damaging and their dissemination is ethically unacceptable,” a prior assessment of their effects must be undertaken. They state that:

“New campaigns should be implemented in the framework of rigorous evaluation studies, ideally in field settings with cohort or ITS study designs. A better understanding of which media interventions work best is likely to result in a more effective prevention of drug use and increased efficiency in the management of public resources.”

Interrupted time series (ITS) and repeated measures studies collect at data points before and after the intervention and the intervention effect is measured against the pre-intervention trend. ITS analysis is deemed a valuable study design for evaluating the effectiveness of population-level health interventions that have been implemented at a clearly defined point in time. ITS designs are used to examine the effects of public health system-wide policy interventions (e.g., mass media campaigns) where it is impracticable or infeasible to use a randomised trial.<sup>30</sup>

Most experts recommend Interrupted time series designs to provide a method of measuring the effectiveness of an intervention when randomisation or identification of a control group is impractical. ITS is increasingly being used for the evaluation of public health interventions; it is particularly suited to interventions introduced at a population level over a clearly defined time period and that target

<sup>29</sup> <https://saferdrugpolicies.com/harmreductioncampaign>

<sup>30</sup> Allara, et al (2015)

population-level health outcomes. Pietra Blakely describes the ITS process as departing from the “assumption you are making is that the population was on a trajectory and that it would have continued on that path without the intervention. This accounts for all the other things that were going on in the environment when your intervention went into effect. Your analysis looks for a change in level and slope between the trajectory that had been established before the intervention and the trajectory that is observed after the intervention.”<sup>31</sup>

DEN supports the robust evaluation of programs to ensure best practice and the determination of the effectiveness of public communication campaigns.

### **c) identifying best practice approaches to designing and implementing campaigns, including social media, digital channels and traditional advertising, to guide Australia's approach to drug demand reduction**

Most studies that have been assessed are for media campaigns conducted in the United States. The questionnaires used to ask young people (in particular) about their use or intention to use illicit drugs are diverse and rarely comparable. Several indicators of success have been consistently cited in the literature as contributing to efficient and effective practice in relation to the evaluation of health communication campaigns. Identified indicators of success include clarity about what is being evaluated and the use of evaluation research designs that promote rigour including pre-post-test, cohort designs, time-series designs and natural experiments. The use of post-test only designs is severely compromised but may be the only option in situations of scarce resources.

Sixsmith *et al* confirm that, “Evaluation activities conducted before, throughout, and after campaign implementation are necessary for many reasons, such as to determine if, and to what degree, the campaign was successful, to identify why or how the campaign was successful and to gather reliable data that will inform the development of future campaign activities. Furthermore, evaluation can help researchers to compare the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of a programme, verify its quality and its applicability to various settings or circumstances and replicate or scale up the intervention where feasible.”<sup>32</sup>

Based on the available evidence, DEN contends that successful campaigns are those which:

- Are based on evidenced processes
- Include consultation with stakeholders
- Are not overtly fear-based appeals, making exaggerated and unrealistic threats which can be easily disproved or are inconsistent with a person’s experience

<sup>31</sup> Pietra Blakely When the intervention affects the entire population: Interrupted Time Series, <http://blog.pietablakely.com/interrupted-time-series>

<sup>32</sup> Jane Sixsmith, Kathy-Ann Fox, Priscilla Doyle & Margaret M Barry (2014), A literature review on health communication campaign evaluation with regard to the prevention and control of communicable diseases in Europe, p. 5, Stockholm, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/media/en/publications/Publications/Campaign-evaluation.pdf>

- Are targeted to the people they seek to influence

#### **d) the efficacy of the current and past National Drug Strategy in achieving demand reduction through public communications campaigns**

The National Drugs Campaign (the campaign) developed by the Australian government has been running since 2001. The campaign is part of the National Drug Strategy 2017–2026. Although it targets the whole Australian population, it specifically aims to reduce young Australians' motivation to use illegal drugs. It does this by increasing their knowledge about the potential negative outcomes of drug use. However, there has been a continued disparity of funding demand reduction and supply reduction on the one hand and harm reduction (the Pillars of Harm Minimisation) on the other.

Historically, despite its stated intention of ensuring that each of the three pillars is equally important to the success of the strategy, resource allocation has continued to be far greater for demand and supply strategies. In 2015, the Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) noted that "There was a much greater allocation of resources for law enforcement programs that seized drugs and reduced supply [21]. Of the \$1.7 billion spent on illicit drug interventions in 2009-10, 66% pertained to law enforcement, 21.3% to treatment, 9.2% to prevention, 2.1% to harm reduction and 1.4% to other programs."<sup>33</sup>

DEN recommends more equality of funding between the three areas of focus in the "three pillars" model. Extra resourcing of harm reduction could result in sufficient funding to build a substantial evidence base for what works, especially for the specific target groups identified in this submission.

#### **e) any related matter**

DEN agrees that public communication campaigns can be of benefit in the "tool kit" to prevent harmful use of substances. However, we have noted that:

Anti-smoking and other health campaigns appear to be more successful than anti-drug campaigns in changing behaviour. Perhaps this is because anti-smoking and other health campaigns are backed by significant interventions in the community and are not compromised by issues of legality. This needs to be examined further.

- It seems apparent to us that public media campaigns have a better chance of success if they are complemented by a broader group of interventions. For example, interventions like the "Icelandic model." The Icelandic Model of Adolescent Substance Use Prevention focuses on both risk reduction and the enhancement of protective factors at various levels of prevention. It has

<sup>33</sup> AMSA (2015), Policy Document Illicit Drug Reform policy, Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA), <https://amsa.org.au/sites/amsa.org.au/files/Illicit%20Drug%20Reform%20policy%20%282017%29.pdf>

significantly decreased drug use from one of the highest rates of youth drug and alcohol consumption in Europe twenty years ago to one of the lowest for youth drug and alcohol rates today.<sup>34</sup> This programme is being piloted in a number of at-risk communities in Australia and demonstrates the importance of “on the ground” interventions that address the issues that promote drug-taking behaviour in young people.

- Shock tactics, shaming and incitement of disgust have no place in the public arena. They promote stigma and impact on a person’s willingness to seek help. That is not to say that honest portrayal of possibly disastrous impacts of substance use should be avoided; however this must be accomplished in an honest, non-sensational way.
- Campaigns should start with consultations with stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, CALD groups, young people, LGBTI communities and others. Effectiveness cannot be guaranteed if designers of programs do not understand the motivators and point of view of the people they are targeting.

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<sup>34</sup> Nkayla Afshariyan (2019), The program that stopped teen substance abuse in Iceland is coming to Australia, ABC net, <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/planet-youth-preventative-drug-model-trials-in-australia/11245926>