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# Parliamentary Inquiry into Communication Campaigns Targeting Drug & Substance Abuse

Dalgarno Institute Submission



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Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement  
PO Box 6100  
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Dear Committee,

The Dalgarno Institute sincerely thanks you for the opportunity to offer a submission toward an *Inquiry into Public Communication Campaigns Targeting Drug and Substance Abuse*.

The institute is a long-standing not-for-profit organisation that seeks to assist governments, schools and communities to rediscover proactive and protective options of best-practice prevention and demand reduction models in the alcohol and drug arena.

*“Over 150 years of Minimizing Harm, by Maximizing Prevention”*

We believe that the seriousness of illicit drug use in Australia necessitates urgent, collaborative and sustained efforts to educate, limit, proscribe and provide treatment.

## Introduction

Illicit drug demand is at a critical juncture particularly at a time where the Australian criminal drug manufacturing and distribution networks are well established, sophisticated and tremendously successful operations embedded within interrelated global systems.

But the abundant supply of illicit drugs always looks for greater penetration both in existing and expansion into new markets. Essentially, these syndicates are now pursuing the facilitation of greater drug demand. Therefore, this must also become the crucial area for positive public action in the form of clear, relevant and well targeted information campaigns, with a particular emphasis on preventing and/or delaying the age of drug use initiation. Toward that aim, specific issues are addressed alongside recommended action points.

This is an enormous challenge especially as the public and specifically youth perceptions of the nature and effects of illicit drugs is increasingly being shaped through media and entertainment culture, presenting drug use as normal, experimental and victimless behaviour often being falsely portrayed as less harmful than alcohol and tobacco.

Of course, this ignores that the latter substances have had far longer and widespread history of social use but similarly were once passionately argued as

harmless, private indulgences until overwhelming evidence essentially settled the debate and won over public consensus.

Added to this, the multi-level accelerated destructive capacity of illicit drugs far outstrips that of alcohol and drugs and when combined<sup>1</sup>, exponentially adds not only to the levels of mortality but adds to the physical, mental, social and economic deterioration.

Once again, it is a difficult but not impossible task as the aforementioned campaigns over tobacco and alcohol fought over decades have proved largely successful. Drawing and understanding these strategies can offer a way forward for campaigning on drug demand reduction.

The most effective means to push back against growing illicit drug demand lies in changing mass public perceptions that challenge populist narratives. This requires long-term and multifaceted strategies.

This is the reason the *National Drug Strategy* formed in 1985 and reaffirmed in 2017 settled on a three-pronged approach to tackling illicit drugs at demand, supply and harm reduction. Three decades on, the strategy remains sound but faces many internal challenges including the lack of clear, cohesive agreement and commitment to its stated goals between all related sectors of governance. In practice, this presents the public with mixed and conflicting messaging. Any manifestation of cognitive dissonance, particularly unrecognized by the public, sabotages the potential of any demand reduction messages.

As briefly alluded to earlier, the task for a unified NDS is put under further strain as it faces many external competing forces, largely due to the generally pro-illicit drug messaging of popular culture within the entertainment industry but also reinforced within media and countless political pro-drug lobby groups.

These are all heavily overlaid with narratives on the alleged failed war on drugs. This phrase and corollary arguments are reinforced through insistent and extensive messaging repeatedly heard and read in virtually every discussion, article, media release, and categorically accepted as ‘fact’.

They also serve to form the philosophical and social justification to end the so-called war drugs and reframe the blame for the extensive human and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple poly drug use is becoming normative among Australian illicit drug users.

Dawe S et al, Australian National Council on Drugs, *Drug use in the family: Impacts and implications for children* (2007), p.45.

Copeland J et al, Australian National Council on Drugs, *Cannabis: Answers to your questions* (2006). p.7.

Stafford J et al, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Australian trends in ecstasy and related markets 2005: Findings from the Party Drugs Initiative (2006), p.16.

costs not to the barbaric and far-reaching criminal cartels but wholly on law and order, that is, police, government and civil society in general.

Practically, this brings about policy conflict within civil departments, curbing sustained attempts at rolling back drug demand and supply as such efforts seem at odds with a growing, but manufactured, public consensus that views these attempts as futile, wasteful and adding to public harms.

Yet these narratives – deliberately or ignorantly – have attributed the war on drugs to the wrong causes; completely glossing over the findings of multiple in-depth public commissions dating from the 60s, supported through a plethora of newspaper and police investigations into organised crime, institutional corruption and illicit drugs. Buried within the thousands of pages they reveal the stories of countless brave law enforcement officers, politicians and media who risked much, including their lives, in the fight to expose this lethal trade. But importantly they unequivocally link the numerous deaths and harms related to this trade not resulting from the “harsh” arm of law enforcement but rather directly caused through bitter and ruthless internal criminal conflicts.

Furthermore, Australia is revealed as a not a sleepy, remote backwater but a key criminal base with pre-existing established longstanding and high-level ties to international networks that have not only continued to flourish but laid the foundation for the virtually unabated manufacture, supply and distribution of illicit drugs.<sup>2</sup>

A summation of the twenty one commissions directly or indirectly involving Australian illicit drug supply is best expressed in the words of Justice Woodward, “I’m afraid it’s like many commissions...it never intended that they should find out too much because anything that’s found casts a slur upon any part of the administration of the country or the state is accepted without question by the government as a slur on them.”

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<sup>2</sup>In fact, it was the 70s cannabis drug trade that began delivering outrageously enormous profits paying for countless “grass castles” and the capital needed for the “rapid expansion” of Australian criminal activities including the funding into numerous “legitimate” businesses.

The vast injection of cannabis profits from the 70s included those from the Trimbone family network which racked in \$1.5 million annually through merely one of its drug distribution lines (later there would be a decided collective mafia shift into more lucrative and profitable substances of heroin, cocaine and ecstasy). These profits allowed for a ramping up in the efforts to bribe judges, magistrates, politicians and police but also the infiltration into civil departments, alongside the expansion of subsidiary exploitative businesses such as gambling, prostitution, child sex trafficking, small arms dealing, tax evasion, immigration and insurance fraud. By the close of the 80s, illegitimate Australian activities funded through illicit drug supply were described as a “huge conglomerate empire”.

Authors Clive Small and Tom Gilling in their book *Evil Life: The Truth Story of the Calabrian Mafia in Australia* (2016) state that the “central node in a matrix of organised crime gang’s principle business was drugs and whose trademark was lethal violence.”

Nevertheless, it is precisely because illicit drug markets operate and thrive in the murky, dark world of half-truths, deceit, subterfuge, obfuscation and manipulation, that it can only continue to advance if the entirety of their activities and influence are suppressed, scorned or selectively reported.

For this reason, the submission also brings attention to the lack of public awareness campaigns on the true nature and causes of the illicit drug conflict. As this selective, skewed view of drug facts creates a broad cognitive disconnection between fact and fiction.<sup>3</sup>

Added to this, there is another powerful message that has yet to be explored. The lesser known facts surrounding the vast environmental harms of drug manufacture and waste in the form of large-scale ecological damage are barely ever made known to the public.

This includes the coercive, underhanded takeover of millions of hectares prime private grazing,<sup>4</sup> agricultural lands, the destruction to public crown land, the significant pollution and high demand on scarce water resources and finally the horrific, merciless abuse and exploitation disproportionately affecting women, children, youth, the poor and particularly indigenous communities.

Surely, in an age of unprecedented socially aware consumerism founded on fair trade principles this is a highly persuasive message that can significantly impact drug demand based on factual conscientious objection.

The war on drugs has not failed but remains to be effectively fought in the public information domain.

## **Restoring the Balance – The Lack of Public Drug Demand Reduction Information Campaigns**

In a free democratic society, the continued right to choose well rests on access to all necessary information in order to rationally assess the benefits and risks associated with those choices. As no individual can fully consent to what they have no conscious understanding and awareness.

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<sup>3</sup> This intellectual dissonance artificially increases illicit drug demand based on the knowledge gap created not only of the immediate and longer-term physical, mental and relational consequences to the individual and families but also on the well documented, pervasive and virulent effects to communities, along with the corrosive effects of vast sums of illicit drug profits funnelled into all levels of civil, media and legitimate businesses.

<sup>4</sup> Authors Small and Gilling in *Evil Life* note that the early days (late 20s through to 40s) witnessed The Black Hand gangs extorting funds and ‘protection money’ through “water pollution, stock poisoning and cane burning. All ancient and traditional Society tactics in Calabria.”

The government's priority, having legislated a behaviour or activity as unlawful is to inform the public of the law, followed closely with the consequences for its breach, alongside the justifying reasons for its introduction, such as its danger to broad public good and threats to safety. The implications arising from a lack of public awareness as it applies to real life situations is seen in the rise in crimes and harms related to illicit drugs.<sup>5</sup> In the case of criminal sentencing, a critical determining component is the degree of foreknowledge on the part of the offender.<sup>6</sup>

Added to that the practical need to continually and effectively communicate all these layers of information is because what was plainly known and understood by one generation is not necessarily the case with each succeeding generation unless it is reinforced and taught afresh.

The successive passing on of shared knowledge underpins educational institutions in shaping cultural and individual identity; protecting from ignorance and mythmaking.

Most of all, these conditions provide another layer of safeguarding or a type of custodial care for children and youth, ensuring the best possible environment is preserved in order to thrive and not merely survive. (U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989: [Article 33](#))

## **Children and youth not sufficiently targeted for drug demand reduction – Emphasis shift on youth, families, indigenous communities and mental health**

When considered on the whole, the basic standard of care for key information to our most vulnerable has not materialised within illicit drugs messaging. The growing absence from public view of a complete multisided picture of drug use including its dangers and reasons for legal prohibition was borne out in

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<sup>5</sup> [https://crimestats.aic.gov.au/DUMA/2\\_use-offending/](https://crimestats.aic.gov.au/DUMA/2_use-offending/)  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/15db8c15-7062-4cde-bfa4-3c2079f30af3/21028a.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

“More people reported being a victim of an illicit drug-related incident in 2016, increasing from about 1.6 million in 2013 to 1.8 million in 2016...” (p.9)

<sup>6</sup> Maxwell P, Nettle and Redlich JJA said in their joint judgment in *R v Martin*

“As these examples illustrate, the critical factor in determining the significance of drug-induced psychosis for sentencing purposes is the degree of foreknowledge on the part of the offender.”

testimonials from the parliamentary committee assessing the impact of illicit drug use on families. Students and parents testified they were barely aware of current drug laws or evidence of the dangers of new drugs.<sup>7</sup>

For example, the 2007 parliamentary inquiry heard a parent's statement of their fourteen-year-old being asked to "do a project on drugs" with no further instructions. The student chose to research and experiment with glue sniffing and were duly suspended.

At another school, illicit drugs were compared to taking vitamins or medication with an overhead projector showing a Colombian street party scene featuring five big men holding huge straws up their nose. Parents also felt their ability to protect and care for their children was undermined with conflicting and dangerous views on harm minimisation.

Similarly, the 2015 *Aston Ice Report*<sup>8</sup> that dealt with the alarming rise of Ice (Australia now leads the world in methamphetamine use) listed among its recommendations included:

- Hard hitting public campaigns similar to the anti-smoking campaign, AIDS campaigns such as the Grim Reaper, prominent drug ads seen across the US, various personal story hooks within ads (TACs *Girlfriend* ad based on *If you drink and drive, you're a bloody idiot*).
- Early education with a strong message about the multiple dangers of drug use, and
- Don't portray drugs as 'cool' or 'party drugs' on TV and media.

Parents of current and former ice users unanimously agreed that knowledge was lacking, and front-line campaigns were desperately needed targeting schools and the wider community that mirrored previous public campaigns such as Quit, anti-speeding, anti-drink-driving, HIV AIDS and heroin dangers in the 90s.

But the level of public information must now rise significantly from a low base line to meet the disproportionate supply and demand for illicit drugs. Many parents alarmed at ease of access stating that it was "way too easy" to get drugs.

The report also highlighted the need for counter messaging against popular attitudes of drugs as "cool" and "everybody's doing it so it can't be harmful"

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<sup>7</sup> Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives. Standing Committee on Family and Human Services. & Bishop, Bronwyn. (2007). *The winnable war on drugs: the impact of illicit drug use on families*. Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1194410885> pp.146 and 152.

<sup>8</sup> <http://alantudge.com.au/Portals/0/PDFs/Aston%20Ice%20Report.pdf>

that are heightened through labelling illicit dangerous substances as “party drugs” or “recreational drugs”. A message particularly attractive but destructive to developing children.

Ignorance of fundamental drug facts is also suggested from data showing 65 per cent of first-time users begin from curiosity and 50 per cent are influenced by friends or family and 15.3 per cent taking for reasons related to “improving mood or feeling down”.<sup>9</sup>

However, curiosity can lead not only to increased use, dependence and addiction but can be the trigger, initiating a state of “feeling down”, initiating a cycle of dependency on chemicals to emotionally adjust.

This is an effective message for youth and parents given that mental health<sup>10</sup> is an urgent priority. This message needs to come to the foreground as the illicit drug debate has drifted to narrowly defining drug harms with those involving the likelihood of imminent death rather than the numerous idiosyncratic biophysical and neurological effects on quality of life.<sup>11</sup>

Such messaging repositioning is also needed due to growing perceptions of drug use harms often being shaped by images at the extreme end of drug use, such as an emaciated middle-aged addict. An image easily dismissed as unrepresentative of the majority of users.

In comparison, stories such as those of Henry Cockburn show the subtler but no less devastating effects of perceived ‘harmless’ or ‘soft’ drugs such as cannabis. *Henry’s Demons* is an autobiography co-authored with his father and former foreign correspondent, Patrick Cockburn. It details the painful journey of an intelligent and healthy schoolboy that began smoking cannabis at 12-years old. By late teens, he is plagued with severe and agonising episodes of irrational and delusional behaviour that ultimately finds him placed in a locked ward of a mental hospital drugged up on antipsychotic medication.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/15db8c15-7062-4cde-bfa4-3c2079f30af3/21028a.pdf.aspx?inline=true>  
(p.52)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/9DA8CA21306FE6EDCA257E2700016945/\\$File/child2.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/9DA8CA21306FE6EDCA257E2700016945/$File/child2.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Meier MH, Caspi A, Ambler A, et al. Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2012;109(40): E2657-E2664. doi:10.1073/pnas.1206820109.

Rubino T, Zamberletti E, Parolaro D. Adolescent exposure to cannabis as a risk factor for psychiatric disorders. *J Psychopharmacol Oxf Engl*. 2012;26(1):177-188. doi:10.1177/0269881111405362; Patton, G.C., et al. (2002). Cannabis use and mental health in young people: cohort study. *British Medical Journal*, 325(7374).

Auer R, Vittinghoff E, Yaffe K, et al. Association between lifetime marijuana use and cognitive function in middle age: the Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) Study. *JAMA Intern Med*. February 2016. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2015.7841.

[http://www.ukcia.org/research/keele\\_study/Assessing-the-impact-of-cannabis.pdf](http://www.ukcia.org/research/keele_study/Assessing-the-impact-of-cannabis.pdf)

<http://www.schizophrenia.com/prevention/streetdrugs.html#>

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=tsc-executive-summary1.pdf&site=75>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/oct/29/cannabis-schizophrenia-classification>

<https://www.marijuana-anonymous.org/literature/pamphlets/stories-by-teens>



Henry's story is far from an isolated one-off experience, but rapidly becoming the 'usual' with the growth of high THC cannabis.<sup>12</sup>

According to the EMCCA, "cannabis is now the substance most often named by new entrants to specialist drug treatment services as their main reason for seeking help."<sup>13</sup> But this nuanced angle to drug taking rarely makes headlines.

Arguments over causation and correlation of illicit drugs harms also come under continued discussion despite an abundance of anecdotal evidence.<sup>14</sup> A vigorously debated issue formerly used consistently by tobacco industries.<sup>15</sup>

Behavioural insights are increasingly important to understanding human conduct and decision-making assisting to develop and evaluate messaging directly aimed at current behaviour change interventions.<sup>16</sup>

Once again, the 2007 parliamentary committee assessing the impact of illicit drug use on families identified children as, "overlooked in attempts to address the nation's illicit drug problem...[but] focuses on the drug user as an individual without ties or family."<sup>17</sup> (p.48)

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<sup>12</sup> "Among people aged 14–29, the age of initiation into illicit drug use remained stable at about 16.7 years. More specifically, the age at which people first used cannabis rose from 16.9 years in 2013 to 17.3 years in 2016." <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/15db8c15-7062-4cde-bfa4-3c2079f30af3/21028a.pdf.aspx?inline=true> (p.58)

Dr. Robert Du Pont, founding director of the U.S. Federal National Institute on Drug Abuse made the following observation, "In my personal experience the most tragic result of our marijuana epidemic – visible where ever you look in our country today – is the fact that millions of young people are living as shadows of themselves, empty shells of what they could have been and would have been without pot."

<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/04/26/is-marijuana-a-gateway-drug/marijuana-has-proven-to-be-a-gateway-drug>

<https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/nation/2019/12/15/weed-psychosis-high-thc-cause-suicide-schizophrenia/4168315002/>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11364/20191724\\_TDAT19001ENN\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11364/20191724_TDAT19001ENN_PDF.pdf) (p.16)

<sup>14</sup> <http://schizophrenia.com/sznews/archives/001992.html>

<https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/nation/2019/12/15/weed-psychosis-high-thc-cause-suicide-schizophrenia/4168315002/>

Allan Bloom author of the *Closing of the American Mind* writes of the many drug using students he encountered. Bloom posits that Western education was traditionally about effort, achievement and subsequent joy. This has been replaced with the "unearned joy" of immediate reward and pleasure, a tempting experience to begin drug experimentation. "In my experience, students who have had a serious fling with drugs – and gotten over it – find it difficult to have enthusiasms or great expectations. It is as though the colour has been drained out of their lives and they see everything in black and white. The pleasure they experienced in the beginning was so intense that they no longer look for it at the end or as the end. Their energy has been sapped, and they do not expect their life's activity to do anything but produce a living."

<sup>15</sup> Appendix one - Causation and Correlation Arguments

<sup>16</sup> In a recent post by Public Health England on their Public Health Matters blog, focussed on what is becoming ever more vital and central to better health outcomes, that is, understanding behaviours and their impact on health and well-being. <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2018/09/05/using-behavioural-science-to-improve-and-protect-the-health-of-the-nation/>

<sup>17</sup> Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives. Standing Committee on Family and Human Services. & Bishop, Bronwyn. (2007). *The winnable war on drugs: the impact of illicit drug use on families*. Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, p.48. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1194410885>

The Australian Psychological Society also testified that parental drug use was one of the most serious issues confronting the child welfare system in the last 20 years due to child abandonment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and death.<sup>18</sup>

But the message to inform is even more urgent within indigenous communities who are disproportionately affected due to under resourcing and socio-economic disadvantage. Under these circumstances drug harms have a redoubling effect when compared with the broader population. Currently, alcohol and illicit drugs are leading causes of death and preventable disease; and highly prevalent factors in cases of family and community violence and create greater welfare dependence.<sup>19</sup> Socio-economic disadvantage is further compounded with the widespread use of cannabis that is highly correlated with amotivational syndrome.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Page 64 of the 2007 parliamentary committee assessing the impact of illicit drug use on families lists submissions from various states on the inquiries into child deaths. In Victoria, parental drug use was present in nine or 45 per cent of the 20 child deaths known to child protection authorities.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter756Oct+2010>  
<http://healthbulletin.org.au/articles/review-of-illicit-drug-use-among-indigenous-peoples/#summary>  
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-indigenous-australian-communities>  
“Other indicators suggest that these departmental figures may under-estimate child abuse and neglect more among Indigenous children than among non-Indigenous children (for example, Gordon, Hallahan and Henry 2002; Memmott et al. 2001). The Robertson Report (2000: xiii) stated: ‘Violence is now overt; murders, bashings and rapes, including sexual violence against children, have reached epidemic proportions with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people being perpetrators.’”

<sup>20</sup> The 2007 Australian government report *The Little Children Are Sacred* looked at the numerous drug harms to indigenous communities bringing particular attention to the effects of cannabis.  
[http://www.inquirysaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bipacsa\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.inquirysaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bipacsa_final_report.pdf) (p.173-174)

Other historical accounts connecting amotivational syndrome effects from widespread drug use can be found in <https://www.scribd.com/document/57300878/One-Nation-Under-Drugs> and Yemeni social critic Saad Saleh Khalis in 1993 wrote:

*“No development can be achieved in Yemen as long as this plant called qat takes up 90 percent of the spare time of the Yemeni people.... Some may argue that this is an old tradition of Yemen just like the arms and jambiyas. But even if that were so, harmful traditions must be thrown away.... The people and the government are satisfied with cursing qat and its effects.”*

Australian indigenous communities find a parallel with other remote societies such as Papua New Guinea. Already socio-economically disadvantaged, the need for vigor, clear minded vision and dedication of their youth is vital to ensuring the survival of the next generation. In these places the ravages of drug addiction cannot be sterilised through government intervention and the lack of social capital means the consequences are fully realised. “There are people in the community, in each suburb that we call ‘haffie’ or ‘drug body’”. In each community, you see young people who appear to be ‘long-long’. Yet even when we see such people, we don’t think too much about them. Each one of us would still feel the urge to smoke and have a good time. We do not think that perhaps we will be the next ‘haffie’ or “drug body”. Children think that it is a thing to do, to smoke, not realizing the consequence... It is the responsibility of each one of us, adults and rational persons to identify which things are good for us.”

See: Bina, Baka, *Haffies are made, they are not born. Drugs can kill you, say no to drugs*, Kindle edition, p.49.

America’s African-Black communities, “have expressed the view that such programs are merely schemes designed to tranquilise members of the minority community who would be attracted by the availability of cheap drugs to alleviate their social and psychological frustrations. Some members of the minority community would abandon protest and political activity for the ‘easy fix,’ and such programs would saddle the community with lifelong abusers who have been robbed of the incentive to give up drugs.”

Likewise, the 2007 *Little Children are Sacred* report quoted various indigenous leaders lamenting the loss of their communities to destructive behaviours not least the alcohol industry exploiting their communities for profit and now illicit drugs including high levels of cannabis ('ganja') use have exponentially compounded problems to historically comparable genocidal proportions.

Observations included that "non-users encourage some young people to use cannabis because it keeps them quiet and the community calmer," while "children are not fed, supervised or cared for as their parents are too busy smoking, affected by smoking or trying to find/ buy cannabis, cannabis is used to attract young girls children/young people will trade sex for cannabis."<sup>21</sup>

One elder summarising the scale of impact as:

"First there was the stolen generation when the people were taken away from their mothers. This one coming up is the lost generation."

(Makinti Minutjukur, Ernabella, AP Lands, South Australia in Delahunty, B and Putt, J 2006a.)

## Action Points

- A crucial and vital factor for campaigns when targeting specific demographics and behaviours at the onset of new campaigns rests entirely on believability and credibility. Commercials such as NSW *Stoner Sloth* while factually accurate received much criticism and ridicule.<sup>22</sup>
- Rather than drawing from an abundance of real-life examples it used an actor dressed as a life-sized sloth costume and placed in situations like failing in class, messing up at the family dinner table, making sad, grunting sounds and moving slowly due to the effects of marijuana. The campaign uses the tagline "You're worse on weed".

This type of caricaturing discourages relatability, disconnects audiences and, understandably, becomes the focus of mockery. But it also means the doubling up of efforts to regain lost public credibility.

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See: Howard Abadinsky, *Drug use and abuse: a comprehensive introduction*, Boston, Massachusetts: Cengage Learning, 2018, p. 400.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.inquirysaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bipacsa\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.inquirysaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bipacsa_final_report.pdf) (p.173)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rHm8GbTHyE>

Instead, visual images such as real brain scans showing the gradual harms from illicit drugs to developing brains offers a more authoritative scientific approach to messaging.<sup>23</sup>

- The voices of vulnerable populations need further consultation in framing ads towards at-risk communities with a focus on mental health and the spiralling intergenerational cycle of dependency created through illicit drugs. These include indigenous communities, women<sup>24</sup>, children, youth and other socio-economically disadvantaged.
- Given the two major national policy priorities include health and safety issues related to mental health and family violence (particularly domestic violence) and these consistently feature together with illicit drug use, it offers an opportunity for transference of knowledge between local grass roots organisations (e.g. Beyond Blue, various anti-violence and rehabilitative prison support programs) in partnership with governmental inter departmental cooperation. These can work together on co-funded public campaigns that bring greater understanding on intersecting common issues.

For example, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Department of Health and Department of Families Communities are natural partnerships that could find mutual interests (particularly with the rise of hospital doctors, nurses and ambulance workers experiencing patient drug related violence).<sup>25</sup>

- Sporting clubs offer abundant opportunities for fostering high profile positive messaging and community co-operation.

Although high levels of drug taking are revealed within professional sports and in particular AFL,<sup>26</sup> these stories (e.g. Ben Cousins) rather than being a source of ongoing shame can serve as proactive warnings against the spiralling and often unforeseen costs of drug addiction including the potential loss of personal talents, career and family.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Source 'Welcome to Brainplace: Brain SPECT Information and Resources, Chapter 15 – Images of alcohol and drug abuse', viewed on 10 January 2020, at <https://www.amenclinics.com/healthy-vs-unhealthy/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/healthcare/behind-australias-love-affair-with-illicit-drugs-20150424-1msnzz.html>

<sup>25</sup> Lloyd, B., Matthews, S., & Gao, C.X. (2014) *Ambo Project – Alcohol and drug related ambulance attendances: Trends in alcohol and drug related ambulance attendances in Victoria* 2012/13.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/sport/afl/afl-figures-reveal-huge-rise-in-positive-illicit-drug-tests/news-story/7cd56d1caf0940d30befb27d5850327b>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/a-sobering-timeline-of-ben-cousins-drug-addiction-fight-20170327-gv7km3.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-i6PIKdMug>

- Protecting and fostering the entire health of the upcoming generation from illicit drug harms remains a powerful, persuasive and easily identifiable emotive angle, but is mostly unexplored in public messaging as a means to reducing drug demand.

This is particularly pressing as these smaller, vulnerable voices have been drowned out through a focus not only on adult illicit drug user needs but the steady encroachment of illicit adult drug user rights lobby groups into public policy.

### **Learning from successful public Information campaigns and transferring knowledge to illicit drugs messaging**

Previous public awareness campaigns have been successful at not only stating the law but also the associated legal and harmful consequences.

They have been able to merge these objectives through maintaining:

- practical commitment to long running commercials,
- clearly identify specific behaviour and consequences,
- target audiences (particularly demographic for early intervention),
- truthful representations of real-life situations (without unnecessary exaggeration), and
- initially look for maximum impact, and with a goal of creating a widespread atmosphere of social disapproval. The 1989, “*If you drink and drive, you’re a bloody idiot*” drink driving campaign serves as good example that behaviour can be identified and denigrated rather than the individual per se.

The requirement for long running campaigns needs emphasising.

### **Action Points**

- Because of the near complete absence of government funded public campaigns against illicit drugs, the low base line requires messaging begin with multiple general campaigns highlighting the most prevalent dangers of the most commonly used substances: ‘recreational’ cannabis, ecstasy, meth, heroin, etc. This needs sufficient time to penetrate and reset public conversations and attitudes.
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Without doubt this will be fiercely challenged and resisted by many vested interest groups that directly influence drug policy recommendations including the peak lobby group *The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League* (AIVL).<sup>28</sup>

Yet, it remains an unfortunate irony that tobacco, alcohol and recently cannabis were legalised as a direct result of decades of lobbying and obfuscating debates to focus on the comprehensive rights of adults to their civil liberties.<sup>29 30</sup>

However, it is worth recalling that the 1988 UN Convention requires that the possession and use illicit drugs remain a criminal offence in order to help and to protect the young.

It is not framed as a civil liberties issue.

- UN resources on public campaigns against drugs and corruption are available to draw into similar national and local campaigns but also offer the chance of mutual partnership and cooperation.<sup>31</sup>

## **Drink driving campaign successes achievable in tackling drug driving messaging**

The TAC's long running "bloody idiot" campaign still resonates after thirty-one years, ranking as one most highly recollected public information operations.<sup>32</sup>

The success of early campaigns lay in the blunt, graphic and emotional believability.<sup>33</sup> The original task was herculean, with the driving death toll creeping to nearly 1 000 annually. But as the toll, the ads gradually softened to more moderate messages such as "wipe off 5". Today the road toll is less than a third of the original figure before campaigns and there are far more drivers on the road then when the campaign commenced.

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to attached file: *Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) Mapping its Development 2019.pdf*

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.medianet.com.au/releases/158401/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/punch-drunk/4539520>; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/teen-angst/201301/teen-binge-drinking-all-too-common> ; <https://www.roymorgan.com/findings/5446-binge-drinking-whos-doing-it-hows-their-health-201402232202>

Today, what was once pushed as merely an adult choice issue has opened the flood gates to the rest of society particularly the young with 'binge drinking' with its link to high risk behaviour and violence.

Furthermore, the debate gets mired from political double speak. On the one hand groups rail against the evils of big tobacco, alcohol and sugary product corporations but paradoxically allow them to operate so long as they are highly taxed, regulated and of course the public purse once again picks up the burgeoning health tab.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/campaigns.html?ref=menuaside>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/44657/TACDrinkDrivingCaseStudy.pdf](https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/44657/TACDrinkDrivingCaseStudy.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5\\_n5sgcbEc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5_n5sgcbEc)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4v21ZM8JMOw>



While there are people still dying from drink driving, the campaigns cannot be considered unsuccessful. To suggest otherwise is unfair, unrealistic and grossly overstating the scope of government responsibility. For example, similar swipes are never made toward other ongoing ‘wars’ in the fight to preserve public safety and health such as disease, murder, rape, human trafficking, corruption, domestic violence and the environment. However, there is no parlay offered for these similarly described wars, as it is intuitively understood that these must be vigilantly continued at any cost.

This is because while every program or effort exerted has the aim of maximum broad impact but never attains 100 per cent success. As there will always be those that will decide to break the law and thumb their noses at the consequences. Nevertheless prisons, courts and law enforcement still continue to operate.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, road statistics can give numerous factors that explain causes for various accidents and recent increases. Depending on the which set of data selected or indeed what is defined as successful the road toll campaign could be viewed as either a success or failure.

But a deeper analysis of the latest VicRoads campaign<sup>35</sup> shows the increased road toll as significantly attributed to a spike in motorcycle fatalities. The reasons include:

- speed
- cornering
- road positioning
- road hazards
- other road users

The most statistically significant rates for highest injury were for people aged 15-24 years, for both males and females. This indicates inexperience as a key feature, with Victoria the only jurisdiction to record a statistically significant decrease. The steady rise of injuries to cyclists aged 45-64 years-of age to both pedal cyclists and motorcyclists are largely due to more people taking up these forms of commuting. Coupled with population growth this merely suggests that

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<sup>34</sup> As Dr. DuPont explains, “the thought that this is either a criminal justice problem or a public health problem misses the point. Both can work together, and both can have a role in supporting people to achieve recovery. Without the criminal justice effort to reduce supply we would be awash with drugs, and the justice system can be a road towards recovery, such as with Drug Treatment Courts. Treatment can work, but a ‘voluntary drug treatment system is about as effective as a voluntary penal system.’ It is the leverage of the justice system that keeps users involved with treatment.”

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/-/media/files/documents/utilities/about-vr/vrannualreports/vrannualreport201718finalweb-pdf.ashx?la=en&hash=60E270C64AB7522266A059E303D8D4BE>

cyclists are physically more vulnerable of harm on increasingly congested roads that are outpacing infrastructure.

Overall, the case for campaign success seems more reasonable.

More importantly, regardless of the number of road tolls, authorities have steadily increased information campaigns to significantly decrease and eliminate road harms. The *Towards Zero* Road Safety Strategy states the goal, “is a plan to lower the number of lives lost on Victoria’s roads to 200 or less by 2020 and reduce serious injuries by at least 15 per cent. These are the most ambitious road safety targets in Victoria’s history. The plan is about creating a safe system for all Victorians – safe roads and roadsides, safe speeds, safe vehicles and safe road use.”

### Action Points

- The case for comparable drug-driving media strategies now needs urgent attention. In 2015, for the first time in eight years, Victoria’s road toll increased with Ice related fatalities overtaking alcohol.<sup>36</sup> Recent news stories highlight the growing problem with “serial drug drivers [that] make up more than a quarter of those caught on Victoria’s roads, while about a third of people killed have drugs, alcohol or both in their system.”<sup>37</sup>

These mounting but avoidable casualties can only be told in a raw and non-sanitised campaign not dissimilar to the *Think of Us Before You Drive*,<sup>38</sup> adding use of drugs alongside messages of texting or drinking and driving.

Appealing for youth input to target drug taking behaviours and their common environments as in *Make a Film to Make a Difference* strategy that employed for example, Maddy Cheyne's 2013 film *There’s No Place Like Home*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Hill, Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner, 1 January 2015

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/victoria-drink-and-drug-drivers-map-see-how-many-have-been-caught-in-your-suburb/news-story/24d2a89f7f2899f173f1df4968075e26>

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/families-of-road-toll-victims-mourn-the-avoidable-deaths-of-their-loved-ones/news-story/6967ac518ef283e009b7808ae4d5b586>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.towardszero.vic.gov.au/campaign/think-of-us-before-you-drive>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/tac-campaigns/tac-latest-campaigns/think-of-us-before-you-drive#theres-no-place-like-home-safe-2013>



And used television advertising campaigns containing strongly emotive scenes presenting various scenarios including Jonathan Burton's award winning 2012 film *Yes Mum*<sup>40</sup> featuring a heart wrenching phone call from a young man to his mother before his car is inundated under water. Other narratives include staying safe during family holidays, street interviews directly asking bystanders questions of what they consider acceptable road tolls, depicting everyday driving situations with police officers telling them to "think of us before you drive" during every scenario and finally the rethinking speed ad unfolds with confronting scenes including running over a child on a bike to the voice over message, "You decide to speed, speed decides the outcome".

- The US based *Responsibility Grows Here* campaign offers one example of targeting youth and cannabis related driving harms.<sup>41</sup> Which of course could be reworked to include all illicit drugs.
- Western Australia offers one such example with the development of the *Drug Aware* campaign. Its objectives included broadly educating on general drug driving laws and direct consequences, alongside the main effects of drugs on driving, varied health harms and importantly real-life stories from various perspectives.

This also offers a creative direction to targeting the high rates of ice related drug-driving.<sup>42</sup>

## Key Consideration

Awareness and re-shaping public perceptions is not a one-off pitch but an ongoing commitment to purposefully, insistently, creatively and credibly, informing every successive generation.

In alcohol and drug education it is roughly estimated that for each person to change knowledge required roughly 15 hours, to change attitudes needed 30 hours and to change behaviour required 50 hours. But in Australian schools it was estimated that only 44 per cent of students aged between 12-17 received more than one lesson on illicit drugs in the past year.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2X9Q-Xre\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2X9Q-Xre_Q)

<sup>41</sup> <https://responsibilitygrowshere.com/youth-and-marijuana>

<sup>42</sup> <https://drugaware.com.au/about-us/current-campaigns/meth-can-take-control/>

<sup>43</sup> Carruthers S, *Drug Education: Does it Work?* in Wilkinson C and Saunders B (eds), *Perspectives on addiction: Making sense of the issues* (1996), William Montgomery, cited in Ryder D et al, *Drug use and drug related harm: A delicate balance* (2006), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, IP Communications, p.104.

The reality is that because of the widespread entrenched attitudes to illicit drugs, initial strategies and pilot campaigns will not necessarily bring about instant results or may have limited success but this is true of many early endeavours in various industries and organisations. We learn just as much from what does not work. The stated aims can nonetheless remain while still pursuing more campaign strategies. As former Senior Advisor in President Obama's drug policy office, Kevin Sabet, succinctly puts it, "To imply that the worthiness of prevention and treatment requires 100 per cent success rate is, of course, ridiculous."<sup>44</sup>

"Does the fact that some people continue to use marijuana (despite its illegality and our best efforts) mean that we should drastically compromise public health by legalising the drug altogether?"<sup>45</sup>

For example, the US based government funded program, *Drug Abuse Resistance Education* (DARE), was a drug education campaign delivered into schools using law enforcement officer.<sup>46</sup> It was repeatedly singled out as ineffectual<sup>47</sup> often pointed to as 'proof' that information campaigns do not lower youth drug initiation. However, the aims of the program<sup>48</sup> were arguably better fitted as a public relations campaign between students and police enforcement than strictly as a drug demand reduction program.

But for more compelling proof of information campaign effectiveness, we need only follow the money trail. A mere cursory glance at the persistence of advertising agencies and company marketing budgets reveals their belief on the power of persuasion. What is now known due to decades of fighting corporations (in 1998 tobacco companies spent nearly \$7 billion, more than \$18 million a day, to advertise and promote cigarettes — CDC) and the courage of industry whistle-blowers, is that tobacco firms and vested interest groups actively obscured, lied and denied cigarette harms and made concerted marketing efforts to target the young.<sup>49</sup>

The Washington Post reports, "Drug companies spent more than \$3 billion a year marketing to consumers in the U.S. in 2012, but an estimated \$24 billion marketing directly to health care professionals."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Sabet, K.A., PhD. *Reefer Sanity: Seven great myths about Marijuana*, Beaufort Books, USA, 2013. p.233.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.218

<sup>46</sup> <https://dare.org/d-a-r-e-connects-students-and-law-enforcement/>;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug\\_Abuse\\_Resistance\\_Education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_Abuse_Resistance_Education)

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=99>

<sup>48</sup> <https://dare.org/d-a-r-e-connects-students-and-law-enforcement/>;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug\\_Abuse\\_Resistance\\_Education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drug_Abuse_Resistance_Education)

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.who.int/tobacco/media/en/TobaccoExplained.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wnk/wp/2015/02/11/big-pharmaceutical-companies-are-spending-far-more-on-marketing-than-research/?utm\\_term=.65ba5f60223f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wnk/wp/2015/02/11/big-pharmaceutical-companies-are-spending-far-more-on-marketing-than-research/?utm_term=.65ba5f60223f)

Put simply, the right information works, and the same—arguably greater—creative resources are at the government’s disposable today.

### **Anti-smoking campaigns offer quantifiable examples for anti-illicit drug campaigns**

“Neither nature, human evolution, nor fate created the new burdens of chronic diseases and injuries. Rather, it was human decisions made in corporate boardrooms, advertising and lobbying firms, and legislative and judicial chambers”.<sup>51</sup>

No one could credibly argue that tobacco is a substance choice or not a leading trigger of lung cancer.

However, Dr Ian McDonald, a foremost Californian cancer specialist, stated before the US Congressional Committee, “a pack of cigarettes a day will keep lung cancer away.” Similar arguments were made by other leading health authorities.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, there are many overlapping health themes connecting tobacco with marijuana smoking. Both are derived from plants, drawn into the lungs and digestive system the same way and absorb many of the same compounds. The differences are that the former contains nicotine and the latter cannabinoids.<sup>53</sup>

But again, just as with the Tobacco Lobby the pro-drug lobby, want to be selective in their promotion and profile of their drug of choice and will use any tactic to achieve that, as portrayed magnificently in the movie ‘*Thank You for Smoking*’.<sup>54</sup>

However, benzopyrenes, the cancer-causing process produced in burning (also found when grilling meats and wood burning) are arguably higher in cannabis and contain more particulates than tobacco.<sup>55</sup> And since cannabis smokers generally inhale more deeply and hold their breath longer than tobacco smokers, the lungs are exposed longer to carcinogenic smoke.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Freudenberg N., D.P. Public Health, McColl P., et al, *The Pied Pipers of Pot: Protecting Youth from the Marijuana Industry*, Grafton and Scratch Publishers, Canada, 2017, p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> <https://cfrankdavis.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/statement-ian-macdonald.pdf>; <https://cfrankdavis.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/joseph-wolffe-statement.pdf>; <https://cfrankdavis.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/ian-macdonald-analysis-cigarette-theory.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/information-medical-practitioners/information-health-care-professionals-cannabis-cannabinoids.html#chp11> (1.1.2 Other constituents); often marijuana also contains nicotine see: <https://ulmhawkeyeonline.com/22627/news/marijuana-smoke-three-times-more-harmer-than-cigarette/>

<sup>54</sup> Cool, Available & Addictive <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aM3oMwFkMgA>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/12/071217110328.htm>; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16729923>; <https://www.science.gov/topicpages/m/marijuana+smoking.html>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.providencejournal.com/opinion/commentary/20140506-michael-c.-cerullo-why-rush-on-pot-rhode-island.ece>; British Lung Foundation. (2012). *The impact of cannabis on your lungs*. London: Author. Retrieved January 2013 from [http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/17670/1/The impact of cannabis on your lungs - BLF report 2012.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/17670/1/The%20impact%20of%20cannabis%20on%20your%20lungs%20-%20BLF%20report%202012.pdf); <http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2017/Cannabis-Health-Effects/Cannabis-public-release-slides.pdf>

Cannabis cigarettes also contain a greater level of tar than tobacco, therefore cannabis users have greater risk of respiratory illness such as cancers of the mouth, throat, lungs and chronic bronchitis.<sup>57</sup>

As one observer put it: “When are people going to realize that breathing in smoke from anything that burns is not a good idea?”

The flawed perception of marijuana as ‘safe’ is likely due to Western media and film representations, particularly from the 70s counter cultural movement that presented drugs as a centrepiece to a carefree, creative generational counter cultural shift encouraging students in particular to, “turn on, tune in and drop out.”<sup>58</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this era witnessed a proliferation of drug use most notably cannabis among students. But even at this early stage, studies were being undertaken challenging the plants seemingly benign characteristics.

The National High School Senior Survey finding (1975-88), initially showed relatively few students considered using marijuana experimentally (19%) or even occasionally (32%) as a risk. But with increased studies and media dissemination on marijuana harms, perceptions began to decrease dramatically to 77 per cent in 1988.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, both have had a history of seed manipulation including cloning<sup>60</sup> for the purpose of producing stronger levels of THC for maximum dependency and/or addiction, greater yields and huge profits for little relative effort.

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<sup>57</sup> Australian Drug Foundation, DrugInfo Clearinghouse, ‘Cannabis’, appeared on site 11 July 2007 at <http://druginfoadf.org.au/article.asp?ContentID=cannabis>

<sup>58</sup> Author Bob Spitz wrote in his book *Barefoot in Babylon* (p.312) that Artie Kornfield (Principal for Woodstock Ventures) literally fried his mind from LSD use. Remembering that this drug and marijuana were in high use and Dr Timothy Leary was advocating marijuana and LSDs as harmless and especially the former for its positive psychedelic awareness properties and later along with many other high-profile elites lobbied for drug decriminalisation and legalisation. “Psychedelic drugs had shot Artie’s personality full of holes. He was a human being inasmuch as his hear-beat steadily and his brain received electrochemical impulses, but otherwise, Artie was what the hippies referred to as a ‘deadhead’ or a ‘casualty’. His behaviour paralleled that of a retarded child.”

Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era* (p. 253)

The precepts for the New Vision of this “experimental society” required:

1. Uncensored self-expression is the seed of creativity,
2. The artist’s consciousness expanded through non-rational means; derangement of senses, via drugs, dreams, hallucinatory senses, and visions, and
3. Art supersedes the dictates of conventional morality.<sup>58</sup>

It was a “narrative of rebellion” staring the primary of self, the rejection of institutionally prescribed norms (foremost parental authority, church and state) where drug use was an essential, indispensable element seen as the “stimulant of a rising alternative society and badge of social transgression.”

See: *Text and Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll*. Warner, Simon. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. p.38.

<sup>59</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED312519.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Small and Gillings book *Evil Life* details the 2005 police raid of nearly 2 800 cannabis plants as part of large-scale cloning operation (p.307) and the large-scale expansion into hydroponic crops.

McColl P., et al, *The Pied Pipers of Pot: Protecting Youth from the Marijuana Industry*, Grafton and Scratch Publishers, Canada, 2017, p.39.

Cannabis contains roughly 400 compounds, 70 of which are psychoactive. THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is the main psychoactive ingredient. As stated earlier, the ‘high’ effect is the main reason for its recreational use.

However, the key distinction lies in the fact that in the late 70s the mean potency for marijuana was about three percent, according to Mahmoud El Sohly, director of marijuana research at University of Mississippi.<sup>61</sup>

*The University of Mississippi Potency Monitoring* project analysed tens of thousands of cannabis samples confiscated by state and federal law enforcement agencies since 1972.<sup>62</sup> Noting that the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana has increased in recent decades, the NIH warns that “daily use can have stronger effects on a developing teen brain than it did 10 or 20 years ago”.

This is consistent from cannabis samples taken from Australian police seizures<sup>63</sup> and is also with earlier findings from the 1998 Australian report: *A comparison of drug use and trends in three Australian states: findings from the illicit drug reporting system (IDRS)*. The potency of cannabis was rated as high by the majority of IDU in the three states (Syd, Vic, Adel) tested.<sup>64</sup> It also found an estimated 1.7% of the sample met criteria for a cannabis use disorder, males being three times more likely than females to qualify for a cannabis use disorder.

Once again, addiction (repeat business model) is the only reason the bulk of illicit drugs including cannabis remains firmly in the grip of the organised criminal networks.

## Action points

- The *Quit* campaign stands out for close imitation. There is no plausible reason why similar public health awareness campaign could not be replicated to addressing the dangers of recreational cannabis smoking. A market the tobacco industry is keen to further exploit.<sup>65</sup>

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Two of the chemicals in marijuana are Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD). THC is responsible for the psychoactive effect and CBD has antipsychotic and anti-anxiety properties. The ratio of THC to CBD is being manipulated by today's producers to provide their customers with a greater 'high'. These higher potency products are known to increase the risk of addiction.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.calgarycmmc.com/Ebooks%20i%20j%20k%20l%20m%20n%20o/Mahmoud%20A.%20ElSohly%20-%20Marijuana%20and%20the%20Cannabinoids.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Definition cited in the Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary.

The average potency of all seized cannabis has increased from a concentration of 3.4 percent in 1993 to about 8.8 percent in 2008. Potency in sinsemilla, (a highly potent marijuana from female plants that are specially tended and kept seedless by preventing pollination in order to induce a high resin content) in particular has jumped from 5.8 percent to 13.4 percent during that same time period.

<sup>63</sup> <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/news/high-levels-thc-australian-cannabis-new-study>

<sup>64</sup> The Queensland Yuleba bust (1993) used skunk cannabis that produced plants very high in THC.

<sup>65</sup> <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/Mono.41.PDF>, pg.37

<sup>65</sup> Cannabis smoking has emerged as a rebranded Big Tobacco 2.0 — Phillip Morris' parent company Altria bought the domain names “AltriaCannabis.com” and “AltriaMarijuana.com”— is poised to make billions; as



It could focus on the similarities between tobacco and cannabis smoking, plus the rise in e-cigarettes among youth and its associated growing list of health dangers and deaths associated due to contaminants including THC. The targeting of the rise in is cigarettes, vaping and e-cigarettes has with the added potential of pushing back the re-normalisation of cigarette smoking, rolling back decades of successful campaigning.<sup>66</sup>

As cancer and lung disease are also well documented in cannabis smoking, there is sufficient cause for creating campaigns showing real life sufferers of chronic lung disease like those used to discourage cigarette smoking.<sup>67</sup>

- Another more targeted overseas campaign for steady substance reduction is also seen in *Stoptober*. It is based on the insight that if you can stop smoking for 28-days, you are five times more likely to be able to quit for good. The campaign makes quitting more achievable with a smaller time frame and specific start time.

*Stoptober* encourages as many smokers as possible to prepare to quit from 1 October by taking part in the campaign and utilising the range of free resources and support.

These longer-term strategies further encourage smokers to make small changes to their lifestyles such as eating too much unhealthy food and sedentary lifestyles, that can have a big impact on their future health.

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experienced when US states passed cannabis legalisation, companies and markets went into frenzy. Australia's medical pot industry has already made significant global gains and legalisation will exponentially increase profits with the added spinoff of filling drying government coffers. Corporate monopolisation has always been the object of legalisation despite statements alleging feigned concern from drug lobbyist that "large companies and rapacious businessmen" will squeeze out smaller competitors. One of the biggest advocates, Allen St. Pierre, former Executive Director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), admitted to contacting major tobacco firms as their business model is the most applicable for marijuana trade.

[https://www.mni.com/blog/advertmarket/how-are-legal-marijuana-businesses-advertising-their-product-key-statistics/article\\_e9a68524-5f99-11e9-9100-5f02ba980602.html](https://www.mni.com/blog/advertmarket/how-are-legal-marijuana-businesses-advertising-their-product-key-statistics/article_e9a68524-5f99-11e9-9100-5f02ba980602.html)

<sup>66</sup> <https://time.com/5688229/cdc-thc-vaping-deaths/>

<https://news.sky.com/story/us-vaping-deaths-linked-to-thc-not-nicotine-11848431>

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9276106/woman-39-killed-by-cannabis-in-first-ever-thc-overdose-after-vaping-marijuana-chemical-coroner-rules/>

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2019/08/29/vaping-deaths-thc-cartridges-investigated-wisconsin-cases/2154799001/>

**Australian ABC investigation:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G739xd-ncpI>

**Latest key observations on vaping in the US:**

- The CDC counted 2,561 cases of vaping-related lung injuries and 55 deaths as of December 27
- The FDA banned flavoured vape cartridges, all except menthol and tobacco, for a while.
- PAX, the marijuana company that gave us JUUL, introduced a vaporizer made exclusively for THC.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO2nGxbAyyE>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2E5iGHBWaw>

This approach merely pulls together overwhelming evidence that many of the issues that undermine or enhance our health outcomes have structural, social and behavioural determinants including

- the environments where we live, work and play,
- how education, employment, income and access to health care services are distributed, and
- our experiences and perceptions of the built and online settings, social behaviour, stigma and discrimination.

It reinforces the growing view that the behavioural and social sciences play a vital role in a multi-faceted approach to addressing many of the leading public health issues, including infectious and preventable diseases, mental illness, smoking, poor diet and physical inactivity.

While seen as essential to protect public health, there is a growing appreciation that these policies over time have collectively contributed to a social climate in which certain behaviours (not individuals) are socially stigmatised as harmful and studies continually show that public perception shapes decision making.

- Information campaigns that encourage change from drug dependency as an individual journey to recovery.<sup>68</sup>
- Whereas, a more targeted campaign could also be mounted addressing the persistent perception of drug ‘safety’ while also effectively countering the mythmaking that today’s drug production is the same in quantity and quality of the 60s and 70s specifically targeting the increases in THC. This also speaks directly to earlier public forums calling on methods to dispel the largely youth perception of drugs as ‘cool’ and that there are ‘safe’ levels and means of using illicit drugs.

The gradual physical deterioration of substance use offers a real life striking visual angle for public health campaigns. Cigarette packaging now replaces product branding with graphic images of physical deterioration with a particular focus on teeth.

The phenomenon of meth teeth and generally accelerated physical deterioration presents as the obvious messaging counterpart. Severe teeth hygiene particularly evidenced in chronic drug users is also associated with a host of health problems including a higher risk of dying.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyIJo7VCdPE>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3885153/>

The 2004 *Crackdown on Drugs* campaign launched across print, television and radio by the London Metropolitan Police is a relevant parallel. It featured actual photographs of methamphetamine and heroin users illustrating the dramatic physical deterioration.<sup>70</sup>

Such an approach formed part of the recommendations to the 2007 Impact of illicit drug use on families report with medical testimony of the extensive damage caused to the entire person.<sup>71</sup>

- Another compelling campaign exposing the accelerated effects to physical appearance is seen from the confronting images found within *The Meth Project*.<sup>72</sup>

This campaign positioning directly targets teenage attitudes, a demographic known to be highly sensitive to changes in appearance and body image.<sup>73</sup> It offers another useful possible preventative counter message that warns against initial drug use.<sup>74</sup>

Overall, these campaigns reinforce successful messaging that can effectively target various harmful behaviours over very broad socio-economic demographics. Likewise, they offer positive encouragement that it is possible focus on drug harms without stigmatising or isolating individual drug users.

## Targeting illicit drug criminal networks, not drug users

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/new-campaign-metropolitan-police-anti-drugs/226870>

<sup>71</sup> In a submission to the committee, Dr Stuart Reece noted that:

“The decrepit and dishevelled state of many drug affected persons is well known [to] both the community and the committee. It is established in addiction science that all addictive drugs impair cell growth and division. They also accelerate cell death processes, either when used singly, or in the common combinations in which they are used by patients. These changes, combined with the DNA toxicity which has been previously demonstrated for cannabis and tobacco, are the cellular and molecular underpinnings of ageing at the cellular level. These findings suggest that the poor appearance of addicted persons, together with many well-known features of their pathology including poor teeth, high rate of infections, high rate of tumours and very high death rate, actually reflect an accelerated pattern of ageing at the level of the whole organism.”

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.methproject.org/answers/will-using-meth-change-how-i-look.html#Mug-Shot-Match-Up>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqZX0xdKT5E&list=PLCDF2D66BA417BFE5>

<sup>73</sup> Two factors point to the informed rationality for such advertising choices. Adolescent girls are overly conscious of their appearance, investing disproportionate cognitive and emotional energy. This no doubt explains the sheer volume of advertising produced for beauty industries often leaving consumers less satisfied with their appearance. Given that drug use initiation remains predominately a youth phenomenon, the Meth Project and London based drug messages are valuable and accurately alert the public to the rapidly disfiguring nature of drug harms with the aim of discouraging or delaying drug uptake.

Sylvia K. Blood, *Discursive constitution of the body*, Body Work. The Social Construction of Women's Body Image, Routledge (2005) and Nancy D. Brener, Danice K. Eaton, Richard Lowry and Tom McManus, *Weight Perception and BMI among High School Students*, Obesity Research, 12(11), (2004):1866.

<https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=honors>;

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/10/101018163112.htm>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xOFDTRVfkW>



Once the veil was pulled back revealing the tactics, deliberate lies and kickbacks used by multibillion dollar corporations specialising in addictive products to enable the mass consumption of goods such as tobacco, alcohol and more recently the pharmaceutical industries complicity for the rise in addiction to opiate derived prescription medication,<sup>75</sup> it opened up a new era of awakening in the form of widescale societal push back.

Likewise, without widespread public knowledge and awareness of the present ongoing activities and historical origins illicit drug networks, the misleading attributions for the so-called failed war on drugs will remain firmly entrenched. These distorted constructions create a tension or conflicting intellectual dissonance, effectively hampering continued and cooperative efforts against illicit drugs that seem at odds with public information campaigns.

Public opinion will have no counter-balanced perspective and continue being shaped through the mythical creations of the entertainment industry and the selected sound bites of the growing pro-drug media messaging influenced through vested interest lobby groups. This creates a self-referencing, closed information loop. The effect will be the incapacitation of law and order institutions to successfully combat organised illicit drug crime against the false constructions and developing chasm between popular perception and objective reality.

This is why it was important to place within the introduction to this submission Australia's history of illicit drug crime syndicates.

All these issues link together to create widespread public perception, often beginning with the misconception that the central organising source for this trade's manufacture and distribution is found within smaller disconnected groups such as hippie communes, cash strapped students and small-time dealers trying to scratch together a living. The groups are viewed as the unfair targets of police efforts.

In reality, the illicit trade shares a structural similarity to that of savvy international, conglomerate corporations. It is more accurately described as the work of a multinational corporation with its stock and trade in the misery and destruction of 'flesh and blood'. It has grown richer, stronger and more

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<sup>75</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMNzq6gNDns>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeD8cXtMk\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeD8cXtMk_c)

diversified than ever, far greater than the classic mafia depictions such as the *Godfather*.<sup>76</sup>

The Australian chapter of the oldest secret organised criminal group, the 'ndrangheta, traces its history back 90 years and still is the major player in the growth of organised crime and corruption. It has been responsible of more murders and violence (bombings, stabbings and executions of every variety including that of police officers, detectives, judges and commissioners) than any other criminal organisation. But it also includes much brutal bloodletting directly resulting from internal familial and territorial disputes.<sup>77</sup>

This point needs underscoring. Not only are these facts never openly and convincingly placed in the public domain, but pro-drug advocates often use a subtle sleight of hand fixating the public's gaze toward faux criminal statistics that presented as evidence of excessive legal punishment against illicit drug users. A claim that any examination of prison data does not support.<sup>78</sup>

Overwhelmingly, the extreme violence meted out rivals the tactics of the most inhumane and merciless terrorist organisation. In fact, the 90s witnessed the diversification and specialisation of its operations, first forming alliances with various bkie's gangs such as Hells Angels, Bandidos and Gypsy Jokers, whilst also entering the arena of international narco-terrorism through partnerships with the notorious Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia and the Sinaloa and Medellin cartels. Most tellingly, the 'ndrangheta handed control of the US cocaine market to Mexico<sup>79</sup> so it could concentrate its energies on Europe and Australia where the drug's demand could exact seven times the price.

Alongside the shocking human cost is the near absence of public information targeting the enormous scale of illicit drug related environmental devastation.

In Australia, this has meant positioning drug manufacture activities on the most fertile land such as the Riverina and abundant water supply regions including the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area the major tributary of the Murray River (area

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<sup>76</sup> In 1964, John T Cusack of the *US Bureau of Narcotics* on secondment to *Victoria Police Homicide Squad*, investigating the Queen Victoria Market murders connected with Italian organised crime warned, If not constrained, "it was capable of diversification into all facets of organised crime and legitimate business... To further their legitimate endeavours and cloak their illicit operations, Society members conduct a well-planned program of ingratiating themselves with people of all walks of life."

<sup>77</sup> Small, C and Gilling T, *Evil Life: The true story of the Calabrian mafia in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW. 2016, p.320.

<sup>78</sup> Appendix two - Cannabis Incarceration Statistics, Law Enforcement and Organised Crime

<sup>79</sup> The book *Evil Life* documents the strategic deal between cartels, and this is also backed up in new reports.

<https://7news.com.au/original-fyi/crime-story-investigator/mexican-drug-cartels-how-they-infiltrated-australia-and-have-more-power-than-ever-c-56709>

And this is the situation faced in N.Z. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/115693408/mexican-cartels-target-nz-in-perfect-storm-of-high-cocaine-prices-abundant-supply>

so desperately contested for competing water rights)<sup>80</sup>, spread across thousands of hectares found in every state using crown land and farmers often indebted and exploited to leasing land for cash.<sup>81</sup> But the waste it is also seen from the chemical waste and drug toxicity detected in waterways.<sup>82</sup>

Internationally, the damage also continues to wreak widespread havoc. Colombian Vice President, Francisco Santos, in a 2007 interview told *Gnosis* magazine:

“Cocaine finances terrorism in Colombia...and finances the environmental disaster which...plagues the entire South America. Colombia has lost more than 2 million hectares of humid tropic forest in the Amazon areas... this deforestation has served to multiply to coca plantation...and, I must note, that I have never, ever heard, even the hardest among the environmentalists, speak of... this disaster strictly connected with the scourge of drugs.”<sup>83</sup>

Over in the U.S., the vastly outnumbered Californian Fish and Game Wardens are fighting the forced takeover of local and state federal parks (often adjacent to suburban homes)<sup>84</sup> and wildlands against Mexican drug cartel-sponsored marijuana farmers that are well armed and unafraid of protecting themselves and their lucrative product with firepower and booby traps.

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<sup>80</sup> It is impossible to get a real sense of the scale of land and water wasted for illicit drug manufacture. One example is the 5,000 cannabis plants grown on the Binnaway property that used five above ground swimming pools filled up from two kilometres of pipe to run water from the dam to the pools. In Queensland, *The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs* found that cannabis was the largest cash crop after sugar cane. As seen in 1993 where the largest discovered crop in Yuleba comprised of 8,500 plants, more than 8 kilometres of rows covering 31,500 square metres. Each plant had its own drip-irrigation system fed by two dams.

<sup>81</sup> In Victoria, the cannabis growing networks were described as “cleverly arranged” and stocked in with cattle or vineyards to avoid suspicion. These could be found from Donnybrook, Mildura to Shepparton. In 2008 police discovered in Queensland a former sheep property with 1,700 hectares of cannabis crops using 6.5 kilometres of irrigation piping.

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-21/illicit-drugs-found-in-adelaide-waterways-affecting-environment/6409044>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226829819 ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE FROM ILLICIT DRUG CROPS IN COLOMBIA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226829819_ENVIRONMENTAL_DAMAGE_FROM_ILLCIT_DRUG_CROPS_IN_COLOMBIA)

<http://drugwarfacts.org/chapter/environment>

<http://www.ipsmaustralia.com.au/>

<sup>83</sup> <http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/Gnosis/Rivista11.nsf/ServNavigE/9>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWcV94G4rRI>

<sup>84</sup> “Above the quiet, calm, and affluent community of Saratoga, today's mission would take us into another steep canyon, this time on Midpeninsula Open Space property. Alarming close to a wooded community of owners of custom-built houses, this grow site was just like the day before-perfectly positioned and well-hidden with an excellent year-round water source. And like so many other grow sites we found throughout the Santa Clara County foothills; it was insidiously located right under the nose of so many people.”

John Nores Jr., James A. Swan. *War in the Woods: Combating the Marijuana Cartels on America's Public Lands* (Kindle Locations 1017-1020). Kindle Edition. John Nores Jr, James A. Swan, *War in the Woods: Combating the Marijuana Cartels on America's Public Lands*, Kindle edition.

When all these issues are seen as symbiotically connected and considered alongside the sheer volume of illicit drugs that passes through these vast complex operations, *the urgency for drug demand reduction cannot be overstated*. These can be measured from the comparatively minor drug seizures.<sup>85</sup> In 2007, a shipment of nearly 15.2 million ecstasy tablets were intercepted with an average purity of 33.3 per cent, a staggering 1.4 million tonnes of pure MDMA. Making it at that time the “world’s biggest ecstasy bust.”<sup>86</sup>

But the traditional source of illicit drug profits, cannabis cultivation and distribution, still constitutes an estimated 80 to 90 per cent of the market and remains in the firm grip of the ‘ndrangheta. Findings affirmed through multiple criminal intelligence reports and consistently supported by several royal commissions.<sup>87</sup>

Today, the Australian mafia has flourished with an estimated annual turnover of AUD\$60billion.<sup>88</sup>

But of all the factors that have contributed to their near monopolisation of illicit drugs it is silence in the public square that is jealously guarded. It provides the best cover for an image of mystique giving a surreal and legendary status that permits them to operate in plain sight.

According to authors Moor and Wilkinson in their book *Mugshots 2*, decades of denials and silence of the true nature and workings of Australian organised crime was heartily welcomed by the bosses. As they “hate publicity.”<sup>89</sup> Most of all silence has served as a tool more effective than all the acts of violence. As an instrument of widescale psychological warfare, it has ensured public complacency and apathy against a clear and very present danger.

## Action points

- Public messaging campaigns can take on multiple platforms for information exchange and joint reinforcement. Despite widescale illicit drug corruption the *Aston Ice Report* noted unanimous support for expanding police efforts. “Almost all argued for increasing support for

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<sup>85</sup> [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/30946730/ns/us\\_news-crime\\_and\\_courts/t/us-drug-habits-help-finance-mexican-cartels/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/30946730/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/us-drug-habits-help-finance-mexican-cartels/)

<sup>86</sup> Small, C and Gilling T, *Evil Life: The true story of the Calabrian mafia in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW. 2016, p.243 & 248.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p.145 & pp.222-223

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p.318.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Small, C and Gilling T, *Evil Life: The true story of the Calabrian mafia in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW. 2016, p.227.

our local police, either through increased resourcing or through implementing tougher laws to protect police from those affected by Ice.”<sup>90</sup>

- This also provides a window of opportunity for police to reinforce and augment multiple public information campaigns with school visits.<sup>91</sup> Similar to the U.S. based DARE initiative mentioned earlier, although criticised as ineffective it nonetheless received positive support. Howard Abadinsky, professor of criminal justice at St. John's University notes, “The use of uniformed police officers as instructors is seen as a key element in the program’s success: Police have knowledge of the drug scene and its impact on both individuals and society as a whole that regular classroom teachers cannot match. Indeed, many classroom teachers frankly admit their discomfiture in teaching lessons on drug abuse. For children this age, police hold a mystique. Kids respond to them.” And because the program “involves police officers in positive, nonpunitive roles, students are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward police officers and greater respect for the law.”<sup>92</sup>
- School presentations and public information campaigns could also include former drug users whose first-hand accounts and the lived experience and earned resiliency that brings, can be woven together with collaborating police information helping reinforce their efforts and widen credibility.<sup>93</sup>
- The existence and scale of organised crime both domestically and abroad needs to find its way back into public consciousness. This was attempted to a degree in the US with a series of advertising campaigns designed to link recreational drug use to the violence of drug cartels.<sup>94</sup> Exposure not suppression of the truly evil machinations of organisations that thrive in the shadows is a public good. And essentially as illicit drugs are products exchanged for money it underpins the right to know of their nefarious means of production. It allows for an opportunity for popular outrage and backlash to its inhumane practices.

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<sup>90</sup> <http://alantudge.com.au/Portals/0/PDFs/Aston%20Ice%20Report.pdf> (p.18)

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/content/what-dea-360>

<sup>92</sup> Abadinsky, H. *Drug Use and Abuse: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2008, St. John’s University, p.277.

<sup>93</sup> Appendix 3 - Selective use of ex-drug addict testimonials including indigenous communities.

*The Aston Ice Report* noted much support for former drug user testimonials including, “As a mother of an ice addict and prior speed habit since 2000, I think the government needs to start looking and seeking information from the grass roots... not the so called professionals but people who see the addiction and know how, what, where and when.” (p.24)

Similarly, the *Impact of illicit drugs on Families* contained recommendations for using ex-drug user stories.

“Australia needs to educate children with the real-life stories they will face if they choose drugs, not educating them how to use drugs or supplying needles.” (p.147)

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnTwn6hwSX8>

- The widescale devastating environmental impacts of drug production and use offers a unique opportunity to engage society and children at a much deeper level – especially those more likely to detach from arguments about health and mental wellbeing. Social justice and social responsibility are vital drivers in the emerging generation, particularly on issues that focus concern on the ethical conditions that produce products all the way down the supply chain. This offers a compellingly powerful message that has a broad appeal across every socio-economic demographic.<sup>95</sup>

## Understanding scare tactics and the dominance of harm reduction messaging

Given this wider context, the noticeable trend of making value-neutral stance on illicit drugs both on a public policy level and increasingly within media needs shifting.

For far too long discussion has steered away from the depraved activities surrounding criminal illicit drug organisations and its broad cascading effects; keeping discussions firmly held down on collateral issues such as an overemphasis of the effects of strong language and images that “may potentially” isolate and stigmatise drug users and/or unnecessarily scare youth.<sup>96</sup>

As noted previously, this approach is at often at odds with the public view but also contradicts other comparable campaigns.

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<sup>95</sup> <https://theecologist.org/2009/may/19/environmental-impact-drugs>

Furthermore, the former vice president of Columbia was scathing in his assessment of the European disconnect to the local impact of illicit drugs. “In my opinion, it is enormously important to educate the Europeans...Europe is experiencing an epidemic of cocaine consumption and it is immensely serious that cocaine is seen like champagne and not like a dreadful evil, as, for example, heroine, the synthetic drugs ...I also had the opportunity to speak to the Head of the French Anti-Drug and he confirmed that cocaine has penetrated the European society to such an incredible extent ... and for this, it is necessary to tell the present and future consumers, above all, the young and very young, that this drug is blood-stained, that cocaine finances terrorism in Colombia, the use of anti-man mines in my Country and, finances the environmental disaster which, together with Colombia, plagues the entire South America.”

<http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/Gnosis/Rivista11.nsf/ServNavigE/9>

<sup>96</sup> The subjective level of linguistic plasticity used is best seen by applying the same logic to another equally valid statement while arriving at a completely contrary conclusion. If ex-ice user stories merely possess an unquantifiable potential for unspecified harms, then reverse must also hold true. That is, they must also possess an equally unknown potential to benefit students.



For example, this jars with other toward zero or quitting campaigns<sup>97</sup> that are focused on an ideal goal<sup>98</sup> and towards that aim provide accurate, timely and targeted information while still offering compassion and support to those struggling to overcome these behaviours.

However, resistance in applying the same standards to drug demand reduction reveals a disproportionate focus toward the minority substance using population rather than the non-drug using majority.<sup>99</sup> The focus rather should shift and reaffirm non-drug using behaviour as positive rather than give the appearance of broad normalisation. That is, run against the “everybody’s doing it” perception.

The justification against using ‘scare tactics’ within illicit drugs is closely connected with the definition of success of “strong messaging” that is measured against the decisions of the minority. The failure of drug information to sway this smaller cohort effectively judges the entire campaign as irrelevant and obsolete. That is, without a 100 per cent success rate, “strong information” is considered a failure. An entirely unreasonable and unrealistic outcome not only for the future of illicit drug messaging but for every curriculum, policy and campaign developed.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> <https://bullyzero.org.au/>  
[https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/programsandprojects/discriminationandviolence/violenceagainstwom/en/cas\\_paper2\\_socialmarketing.ashx](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/programsandprojects/discriminationandviolence/violenceagainstwom/en/cas_paper2_socialmarketing.ashx)  
<https://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/Campaigns>  
<https://www.towardszero.vic.gov.au/>

<sup>98</sup> Swedish Minister for Elderly Care and Infant Health explained their nations zero tolerance campaign towards illicit drugs: “the Swedish vision is that drug abuse shall remain as a marginal phenomenon in the society...The vision is that of a society free from narcotic drugs...[and]preventative measures shall strengthen the determination and ability of the individual to refrain.”

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Sweden’s successful drug policy: A review of the evidence* (2007). p.4.

<sup>99</sup> [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/secondary-school-students-use-of-tobacco-alcohol-and-other-drugs-in-2017\\_0.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/secondary-school-students-use-of-tobacco-alcohol-and-other-drugs-in-2017_0.pdf)

<sup>100</sup> The Meth Project ads have also come under criticism see:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4323270/>

However, the study has limitations:

- It does not provide reasons for meth use decline from 1999. Have people moved to other drugs?
- The study samples meth users to prove its not cost effective to run educational/marketing campaigns. These are the people the message did not get to. Rather they should do both a qualitative and quantitative analysis on the non-meth users and find out why they have chosen to not use meth. Researchers could of course would argue there is no baseline data for this method but that could be overcome by asking the older cohorts as to why they chose not to use meth in their teen years.
- It is not clear as to whether they had factored in the loss of income over the life of the drug user, cost to society due to this drug habit, etc., or have they merely only used hospital admission costing in their calculations?
- Most interesting is Montana’s meth decline recorded from 1999 started at a higher point than the national but by 2009 had recorded a decline that surpassed the national. They have not explained why this is the case. Maybe because the educational campaigns worked? This seems logical as most marketing campaigns take a while to penetrate. It could then be argued it is worth continuing with the campaign as a constant reminder.

Yet, experience reveals that in every society across all demographics and throughout all civilisations there are always individuals who will defy authority, push against sound advice and ignore best practice.<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, the proper historical background that first introduced the idea of ‘scare tactics’ was within in school education. It described the teaching of drug education using *erroneous and exaggerated material* - such as marijuana causing acne, sterility and blindness – intended to literally ‘scare’ students off drug use. This was thought to produce the direct opposite effect on students, that is, it reaffirmed their drug taking choices and even invalidated later attempts at teaching accurate drug information.

“Today’s drug education literatures *warn against such exaggerated claims*. It points out that if students discover that teachers misrepresent the facts in one area, they may conclude that educators are wrong in other areas as well. A misstatement about marijuana, for example, may lead students to disregard a perfectly valid warning about the dangers of amphetamine use.”<sup>102</sup>

Most importantly, “scare tactics” did *not* exclude teaching accurately presented facts but rather it included caution *against* the, “soft-pedal [of] the dire consequences of drug use when there is evidence to prove these consequences.”<sup>103</sup>

This change in the meaning of scare tactics within drug strategy is inextricably tied together with the gradual dilution and misappropriation of the original meaning of the word ‘harm’.

To achieve this requires the gradual reconceptualising of harms not primarily as physical, mental or social consequences related to drug use but those deemed likely to unsettle, confront and upset an individual’s emotional or mental stability and stigmatise drug users.

The words themselves, regardless of intended meaning and motive, are deemed harmful. So while the etymological origins of stigma<sup>104</sup> referred to the literal physical mark of the hot iron on the flesh identifying a slave, the broadening of

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<sup>101</sup> [https://archive.org/stream/schoolsofhellase00freeuoft/schoolsofhellase00freeuoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/schoolsofhellase00freeuoft/schoolsofhellase00freeuoft_djvu.txt)

“Young expect the same treatment as the old and contradict them and quarrel with them. In fact, seniors have to flatter their juniors, in order not to be thought morose old dotards. The counts of the indictment are luxury, bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect to elders, and a love for chatter in place of exercise. The old regime had strictly forbidden luxury. Warm baths had been regarded as unmanly and were even coupled with drunkenness by Hermippos.” So wrote the scholar Kenneth John Freeman for his Cambridge dissertation published in 1907 of Greek youths during the time of Socrates and Plato.

<sup>102</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED158201.pdf> (p.5)

<sup>103</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED158201.pdf> (p.41)

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/stigma>



‘harms’ terms of reference now gives it fluidity, allowing it to effortlessly flow in and out of various contextual streams, expropriated and applied to whatever advances the harm reduction only aims.

The downstream effects that this one small word, ‘harm’, hijacked to fit drug harm reduction goals has far-reaching real-world implications.<sup>105</sup>

But as drug policy researcher, Jonathan Caulkins, explains, “attempting to translate the concept of harm reduction into formal terms brings out key philosophical questions that must be addressed. How does one measure harm?<sup>106</sup> How does one aggregate and compare different types of harm? Which (whose) harms count?”<sup>107</sup>

As with the issue of stigmatisation<sup>108</sup>, rather than seeking to alleviate drug users from the deleterious harms of chemical enslavement, the wounds are nurtured and the “mind-forged manacles” tightened. This further perpetuates societal attitudes toward drug normalisation.

This is primarily because harm reduction as a *dominant* prioritised strategy focusses on informing about safe drug use and associated risks but not necessarily with a goal of reducing drug use. Practically, it diminishes the roles of drug demand and supply reduction to subordinate functions putting the entire NDS policy at risk of irretrievable collapse.

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<sup>105</sup> The now discernible, growing attitude of drug tolerance and normalisation begins first to work its way down from academics such as Professor Hamilton, “harm minimisation assumes that an acceptance of abstinence is irrelevant,” and then into health practice, “doctors and people in position of trust encourage users to ‘cut back to weekends’ or to use clean equipment, without suggesting that a commitment must be made to a drug-free lifestyle or offering help to achieve this.”

Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives. Standing Committee on Family and Human Services. & Bishop, Bronwyn. (2007). *The winnable war on drugs: the impact of illicit drug use on families*. Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, p.15 & p.104, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1194410885>

<sup>106</sup> The result of this policy mismanagement is to shift the blame elsewhere for the rise in new and dangerous psychotropic drugs, persistent drug use rates or drug-related social devastation.

Rather than seeking to re-establish and examine the efficacy of all three pillars of the original NDS structure, the discussion moves around three recurring talking points:

1. Drug use is a growing and unavoidable part of Western life particularly for curious and experimentally wired teenagers,
2. Prohibitive, rehabilitative and punitive attempts have failed and
3. There is an urgent policy need to double down on further harm reduction measures.

<sup>107</sup> Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives. Standing Committee on Family and Human Services. & Bishop, Bronwyn. (2007). *The winnable war on drugs: the impact of illicit drug use on families*. Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, p.408, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1194410885>

<sup>108</sup> However, the long struggle over tobacco and alcohol harms shows that stigmatisation is not concerned with demoralising individuals but increasing public awareness to actual drug harm truths one that Goliathan criminal illicit drug organisations ruthlessly fight to suppress and obfuscate.

To avoid this, all three NDS pillars must be reinstated:<sup>109</sup>

- (1) demand reduction,
- (2) supply reduction and
- (3) harm reduction.

The NDS strategy needs its balance restored so that harm reduction does not procedural preference to its other two principles and if the type of drug demand action points suggested are to have a reasonable chance of making a measurable difference.

## Final Comments

Illicit drug use is neither normal nor necessary for humanity to flourish. It is not a freedom in the classical natural rights sense that requires legislative protection.

Despite this, illicit drugs are at supply saturation levels in this and other nations as attested by the overall small number of seizures but with record breaking amounts of drugs and confirmed through numerous intercepted conversations including a foremost Australian crime leader gloating, “There’s f\*\*\*\*\*g plenty loads going out now.”<sup>110</sup>

This is not without historical precedent as witnessed during the British-Chinese Opium wars. It provides the same ominous warnings and motivation to rid this nation also of the corrosive and ‘unfair’ trade.

*“Trade supports us, governs us, controls us our dependencies...It is difficult to get a commodity into these currents, but once you have got the commodity in, you will find it next to impossible to get it out.”<sup>111</sup>*

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<sup>109</sup> A detailed application of the NDS strategy includes:

- “Harm Minimisation includes a range of approaches to help *prevent and reduce drug related* problems...including a focus on abstinence-oriented strategies... [Harm minimisation] policy approach does not condone drug use,” and
- “Prevention of uptake reduces personal, family and community harms, allow better use of health and law enforcement resources, generates substantial social and economic benefits and produces a healthier workforce. Demand Reduction strategies that prevent drug use are more cost effective than treating established drug-related problems...*Strategies that delay the onset of use* prevent longer term harms and costs to the community.”

<sup>110</sup> Small, C and Gilling T, *Evil Life: The true story of the Calabrian mafia in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW. 2016. P.311.

<sup>111</sup> Appendix four - Lessons from the Opium Wars

More not less targeted, well researched, credible and persistent public information campaigns exposing all the multisided angles of the barbaric illicit drug industry are required. The entire truth is indispensable to begin fuelling widespread public awareness and outrage, beginning the gradual process toward greater drug demand reduction.

But this must also be done with a renewed commitment that will require the singular focus of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary cooperation; drawing from a wide reference base including schools, youth, parents, former drug-users and recovery communities.

Finally, since silence plays exactly into the insidious plans of violent illicit drug crime syndicates it is exactly what must be resisted above all.

*“The power to intimidate may be the ‘ndrangheta’s most notorious weapon but...an equally insidious power—the power to induce apathy, not just in politicians and media; to convince ordinary citizens that it is doing no harm; to foster the delusion that society can afford the cost of tolerating...In the long run this may prove to be the most effective weapon of all.”<sup>112</sup>*

Sincerely yours,

The Dalgarno Institute - Research and Communications Liaison

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<sup>112</sup> Small, C and Gilling T, *Evil Life: The true story of the Calabrian mafia in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW. 2016. p.318

## **APPENDIX TO THE INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS TARGETING DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

### **Appendix One – Causation and Correlation Arguments**

This was the thrust of the arguments levelled against anti-tobacco proponents. The following is an excerpt: “The smoking-cancer hypothesis evolves almost entirely from statistical correlation, which at best can suggest, but never prove causation. It is based on statistical data of highly dubious quality, collected by a variety of agencies by methods that can only be described as haphazard and unscientific. Despite the firm conclusions in the Report on Smoking and Health by the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General, the text has many frailties and inconsistencies. Some of the evidence used to prove the connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer can also be used to prove there is no such connection.”

Of course, direct causal relationships in substances that have multiple chemicals, are slow acting and when taken together with individual biochemistry, environment and other toxins can rarely be ‘proven’ in absolute terms.

This is particularly the case with categories of mental illness, because it cannot always be objectively measured, is categorically inconsistent and subject to change. For example, the use of SSRIs on the treatment of depression were challenged by doctors including the American medical academic Dr Marcia Angell.

These shifting parameters of diagnosis have become a linchpin for rejecting any link between schizophrenia and cannabis. In particular, the pro-drug lobby cites a Keele University study, which does not establish a causal connection. But is this an assertion based on selective use of one part of the report’s conclusions, while at the same time refusing to accept the report’s admission to a correlation with psychosis and cannabis?

The researchers state, “Furthermore, an important limitation of many studies is that they have failed to distinguish the direction of association between cannabis use and psychosis; although using cannabis is associated with a greater risk of developing psychosis, there is also an evidence of increased cannabis use following psychosis onset (Hides et al., 2006; Ferdinand et al., 2005).

This is consistent with higher rates of substance use in general among psychotic patients (Gregg et al., 2007), and in psychiatric illness overall (Frisher et al., 2005). It is therefore difficult to establish a causal relationship.”

One plausible and probable explanation is that the data used for the research taken from the General Practice Research Database did not capture the most prevalent demographic. Widespread cannabis users in the UK are between 12-15-years old and would likely visit an emergency room not a GP. Something the Keele University report acknowledges. It is also worth noting that other studies also support a relationship between cannabis and schizophrenia including Professor Sir Robin Murray, directly contrasting with Professor David Nutt, the authority cited by Senator Leyonhjelm in promoting the recreational cannabis bill.

## **Appendix Two - Cannabis Incarceration Statistics, Law Enforcement and Organised Crime**

This section deals with arguments centred on recreational cannabis prohibition putting pressure disproportionate on the criminal justice system, propping up organised violent crime and stigmatising otherwise law-abiding citizens.

Some stating that as many as 80,000 Australian inmates are charged with marijuana related crimes as merely consumers and users.

The ABS December Quarter 2017 reported the entire full-time prison population was less than 42,000.<sup>113</sup>

A breakdown of incarceration rates from ABS data 114 (2015–16 to 2016–17)<sup>114</sup> according to the offenders’ principal offences are as follows:

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<sup>113</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4512.0?OpenDocument>

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/DA308C67766C3735CA257751001BD477?opendocument>

1. Homicide and related offences decreased for the second successive year, down by 5 per cent or 37 offenders
2. Robbery/extortion increased by 6 per cent or 194 offenders
3. Theft increased by 4 per cent or 3,025 offenders
4. Illicit drug offences decreased 3% or 2,044 offenders

(This was the first time the number of illicit drug offenders declined since the beginning of the time series in 2008–09.)

The data that is attributed to cannabis related arrests would be synonymous with taking all of the motor vehicle related offences (parking fines and speeding offences) and conflating these with motor vehicle related crimes (culpable and dangerous driving, etc.).

Whereas data collected in 2016 through self-reporting, reveals that 45 per cent of detainees tested positive for cannabis,<sup>115</sup> this statistic does indicate the *reason* for their incarceration. What is known from another study focussed on adults in full-time custody in Australia in 2009, is prison inmates have a history of high levels of drug use prior to imprisonment.<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, the following questions need a clarification:

1. Is this figure of 80,000 cannabis consumers due to primarily possessing cannabis?
2. Was the offence part of multiple criminal charges? That is, cannabis and dangerous driving or cannabis and multiple drug taking, or trafficking, etc?
3. Did the charge lead to conviction and/or prison time?

The persistent assertions of high records of cannabis consumers filling U.S. prison cells was also debunked by Carnegie Mellon's, Jonathan Caulkins, formerly the co-director of Rand's drug policy research centre. Caulkins found that more than 85 per cent of prison inmates for all drug-law violations were

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<sup>115</sup> <http://crimestats.aic.gov.au/DUMA/>

<sup>116</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263203599\\_Detection\\_of\\_drugs\\_in\\_Australian\\_prisons\\_Supply\\_reduction\\_strategies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263203599_Detection_of_drugs_in_Australian_prisons_Supply_reduction_strategies) [accessed Jun 11 2018].

clearly involved in drug distribution and the records of most of the remaining prisoners had at least some suggestion of distribution involvement.

Whereas, approximately 0.5 per cent of the total prison population was involved with marijuana possession. This finding was consistent with other mainstream estimates but not from the *Marijuana Policy Project* (a pro-legalization lobby organisation), which Caulkins explains, “naively ... assumes that all inmates convicted of possession were not involved in trafficking.” He determined that “an implication of the new figure is that marijuana decriminalisation would have almost no impact on prison populations.”<sup>117</sup>

### **Claims of Reduction in Organised Crime**

Drug dealers make a comfortable living from low cost, high yield products and specialise in circumventing the law (Pablo Escobar would either bribe or, failing that, kill politicians, judges and policemen), why would legalisation suddenly cause criminals to give up their stake in a lucrative investment?

Australian drug king, Alexander Malcolm Lane, was a Queensland grazier, who along with importing cannabis seeds, grew potent drug hybrids on at least ten plantations across Queensland's Cape York Peninsula and around Cairns. He used helicopters to fly harvested crops from remote plantations to a network of inland roads for transport into Sydney and Melbourne.

Organised criminal syndicates are always adaptable to changing political and economic environments and adept at seeking to commercialise and exploit human nature. And as marijuana is the most widely used drug in the world, it is unlikely to decrease any associated criminal activity.

This is witnessed by the nexus between human trafficking and illicit drugs, which includes cannabis, particularly in harvesting farms. This is witnessed in both Western and third world countries.<sup>118</sup>

It follows a similar trend within countries where prostitution has been legalised, yet sex trafficking has increased<sup>119</sup> compared with countries where prostitution is prohibited. The scale effect of legalising prostitution, i.e. expansion of the market, outweighs the substitution effect, where legal sex workers are favoured over illegal workers. Moreover, the report states that the increase is more likely

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<sup>117</sup> <https://learnaboutsam.org/the-issues/marijuana-and-whos-in-prison/>

<sup>118</sup> <https://kobi5.com/news/human-trafficking-in-the-marijuana-industry-55961/>; <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-cannabis-cultivation-marijuana-farm-vietnamese-minors-children-short-film-a7999426.html>; <https://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/2018/06/06/human-trafficking-investigated-legal-weed-business-south-salinas/679734002/>; <http://theconversation.com/trafficked-to-grow-cannabis-vietnamese-migrants-are-being-exploited-in-britain-83738>; <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/may/23/vietnam-children-trafficking-nail-bar-cannabis>

<sup>119</sup> <https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/lids/2014/06/12/does-legalized-prostitution-increase-human-trafficking/>

to be prevalent in nations with higher disposable incomes as they possess more purchasing power.

Such an example is transferable to all cases of highly profitable illegal trades.

Canada has one of the world's largest illegal marijuana markets and is a major exporter to nations such as Australia.<sup>120</sup> With recent cannabis legalisation in Canada and the push for Australia to follow suit, this network will only strengthen. Once more, changes in the law will merely shift criminal behaviour.

This was the position of a December draft paper to the Canadian parliament.<sup>121</sup>

The key concerns are summarised below:

- The experiences of other jurisdictions and of the regulation of alcohol and tobacco in Canada have shown, regulating a substance does not remove it from illicit markets as evidenced by importation and sales of contraband tobacco. (This trend is supported from data showing alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs that all remain the most widely used goods globally).<sup>122</sup>
- “Given the degree to which organized crime is currently involved in the marijuana market, they could continue to produce marijuana illicitly and may attempt to infiltrate a regulated industry.”
- Canada's illegal market for marijuana is estimated to be worth billions of dollars and organized crime is known to play a major role in illicit production, importation and distribution, the paper says. That means those who obtain pot are exposed to criminal elements.
- Pressure from criminal elements to use more serious and dangerous drugs such as cocaine and crystal meth.
- Enticement of purchasers to become local distributors and therefore embark on a serious criminal path.
- Exposure to extortion, particularly those who do not pay for purchases or, if entangled in dealing, fail to follow orders or meet quotas

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<sup>120</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet\\_3\\_Plantbased\\_drugs.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_3_Plantbased_drugs.pdf)

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/marijuana-legalization-organized-crime-1.3551204>

<sup>122</sup> <https://illicittrade.com/reports/downloads/ITIC%20-%20Illicit%20Trade%20in%20Tobacco%20Products%20booklet%20-%202nd%20edition%20Sept.%202013.pdf>



In addition, where traditional criminal gangs move on to other less detectable products (usually smaller synthetic drugs), they remain a presence domestically, as this author explains, “The Mafia and individual members of big biker clubs generally profit by allowing others to grow and sell marijuana in their claimed territory in exchange for kicking a percentage upstairs. Growers and dealers who refuse to play along can expect a visit – usually in the form of a home invasion – that often combines robbery with assault. But that happens to a lot of other businesses, too – such as tattoo shops, leather stores, gyms, bars and restaurants.”<sup>123</sup>

The trend in marijuana is cultivating plants indoors.<sup>124</sup> This has become so widespread that entire law enforcement courses are dedicated to its detection, particularly as it relates to a growing number of criminal and terrorist organisations using it to finance their operations.<sup>125</sup> And discussed earlier, it is synthetic cannabis that is showing the highest THC potency.

This adds another layer of complexity to proposals that recommend the slowing down of illegal cannabis activity by legislating to allow individuals to grow six plants for personal consumption. In a low-regulated market with minimal risk of detection, drug dealers can easily manipulate any number of disadvantaged individuals. A particularly attractive proposition for cash strapped students who could grow six plants indoors with an average harvest time of three to five months.

### **Appendix Three – Selective use of ex-drug addict testimonials including indigenous communities**

Former drug users should always be carefully vetted and used only as supplementary additions to other school drug prevention programs within age-appropriate settings or public information campaigns.

Recovering users are uniquely placed as they have experienced the many-sided effects of illicit drugs on all the senses and can authentically transmit the all the aspects of drug use.<sup>126</sup> This includes the initial pleasurable hook of a drug high. Drug user recovery stories counteract the myth of an overstimulated culture that promises of instant gratification but does not come with warning labels and money back guarantees. While drug using is temporarily stimulating, enjoyable

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<sup>123</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/3791535/dont-expect-legal-pot-to-cripple-organized-crime-sfu-criminologist/>

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.recoveryfirst.org/blog/indoor-marijuana-grow-operations-on-the-rise/>

<sup>125</sup> <http://www.catlet.org/coursesoffered/marijuanaorganizedcrimeandterrorism.php>

<sup>126</sup> <https://remember.org/liberators.html>

and anaesthetising, its effects wear off quickly and often follow with problems not frequently perceived until much later.

Most ex-drug users far from flaunting previous drug use as feats of heroic acts, speak with caution and deep remorse for the physical, mental and financial waste and the personal, familial and societal harms experienced. They are stories of not of resisting an enemy but of giving way to the easy seduction of chemical slavery; an initially pleasurable experience develops into all-consuming drive to artificially regulate moods, feelings and desires, entirely subjugating mind and body.

If there were no initial pleasure in drug use, there would be little reason in pursuing it. And since leading drug academic centres such as *NDARC* acknowledge the choice for drug use often revolves either around increasing pleasure and numbing pain,<sup>127</sup> these must be genuinely acknowledged and understood alongside the trade-offs between immediate sense of release and long-term harms.

Still other criticisms that surround the use of ex-drug user stories pivot around their “potential” for harm to students in glamorising drug use. While this discards the far broader permissive drug normalisation culture arguments such as these are too generalist the subjective level of linguistic plasticity used is best seen by applying the same logic to another equally valid statement while arriving at a completely contrary conclusion. If ex-drug user stories merely possess an unquantifiable potential for unspecified harms, then the reverse must also hold true. That is, they must also possess an equally unknown potential to benefit students particularly within specific minority groups.

The importance of storytelling can be most plainly witnessed when used intuitively as a path for learning, healing and recovery including indigenous communities.

The stories of a former drug users “fractured” narrative of “spoilt identity” and their recovery of the loss of essential personhood was the subject of the research, *Life Story Narratives of Recovery from Dependent Drug and Alcohol Use: A Tool for Identity Reconstruction Within a Therapeutic Community*.

The authors point out the multilayered process embedded with storytelling, “It may be argued that narrative is not just about telling stories but about gathering

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<sup>127</sup> “There are a number of qualities of drugs that encourage their use. Drugs produce rewarding effects for users (for example, providing pleasure, mitigating pain), so their use is hardly surprising. In fact, much risk factor research fails to appreciate that drug use is a choice.”

<https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/TR.228.pdf>, Page 17

up events of the past from memory and ordering these temporally and coherently so as to make sense of one's life, construct a meaningful identity and discover our trajectory into the future...The process of writing and presenting it to the community mirrors overall 'recovery' as a cognitive and 'profoundly social/relational process' (Hughes, 2007, p.688). Bruner (1991) recognised that humans have a natural readiness or predisposition to organise experience into narrative."<sup>128</sup>

This is practically displayed from an article aptly titled: *The solution to Australia's drug epidemic starts with a conversation*. Brothers 4 Recovery (B4R) was started on a modest enough premise that had always been at the heart of Aboriginal culture, "Good rehab...indigenous focus, good men. Simple as that. From that relatively short conversation, I got on the road to recovery."

Since then Jeffrey Amatto and Steve Morris truck along Australia with their unpretentious but powerful messages reaching out to, "NDIS forums, high schools and jails (it feels good to walk into a jail knowing you'll walk out that same day). We've even squeezed in one of our favourite activities – a night under the stars with 12 "at risk" boys and community mentors out at Bourke."<sup>129</sup>

This personal, relational approach is long overdue as Jeffrey explains, "Australia is facing an epidemic around drug use that Steve and I have experienced firsthand, and Indigenous people are suffering disproportionately. We don't have all the answers to these complex problems, but we sure know where the solution will start..."

It is all about starting and facilitating conversations around the difficult topics of drug, alcohol and gambling addiction through sharing our own stories. Conversations are powerful. Conversations and storytelling have been part of my people's culture for more than a thousand generations. And conversations are at the core of B4R."

In an age of increasing technocratisation of public education<sup>130</sup>and indeed every level of human interaction, the traditional device for communication, storytelling, still powerfully impacts connections built through retelling authentic, personal stories.

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<sup>128</sup> <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/86933/1/32%283%29%20Irving%20paper%20%284%29.pdf>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/30/the-solution-to-australias-drug-epidemic-starts-with-a-conversation>

<sup>130</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/11-million-plus-gates-grants-galvanic-bracelets-that-measure-student-engagement/2012/06/10/gJQAgAUbTV\\_blog.html?noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/11-million-plus-gates-grants-galvanic-bracelets-that-measure-student-engagement/2012/06/10/gJQAgAUbTV_blog.html?noredirect=on)  
<http://www.danielwillingham.com/daniel-willingham-science-and-education-blog/the-gates-foundations-engagement-bracelets>

## **Appendix four – Lessons from the Opium Wars**

The Opium Wars (1839-60) reflect a time when the British government filled its treasuries from the lucrative spoils of the heroin trade into nations such as China that at the time had 150 million opium-smokers, roughly three or four times the population of Great Britain.<sup>131</sup>

The British government primarily through the East-India company grew, pushed and smuggled what was referred to as “white man’s smoke” and “foreign dust”.

“Opium is a pernicious article of luxury, which ought *not* to be permitted but for the purpose of foreign commerce only,” stated the governor general of the company.

Ultimately, this powerful nation used military force during a century of desperate protest and finally armed resistance from the Qing dynasty with the Chinese government finally submitting to legalising the trade of opium.

The result was an embryotic relationship where opium trade was as common as human slavery.

One observer summed up the events.

“Trade supports us, governs us, controls us our dependencies, represents us at foreign courts, carries on our wars, signs our treaties of peace. Trade, like its symbol the dollar, is neither good nor bad; it has no patriotism, no morals, no humanity...and its law is the law of the balance sheet... It is difficult to get a commodity into these currents, but once you have got the commodity in, you will find it next to impossible to get it out.”

Human worth and dignity as in days of the slavery abolitionists must once again be defended and valued against the cold calculation of trade surpluses.

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<sup>131</sup> Merwin, Samuel. *Drugging a Nation: The Story of China and the Opium Curse* (1908), Fleming H. Revell Company, Kindle edition.

