



Committee Secretary  
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

19 January 2020

Re: Inquiry into public communication campaigns targeting drug and substance use

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement. Within this submission, we provide advice on the following terms of reference:

- a. The efficacy of different approaches to public communications campaigns targeting demand for drugs and substance abuse; and*
- c. Identifying best practice approaches to designing and implementing campaigns.*

### **The efficacy of different approaches**

A systematic review was conducted by Allara et al (2015)<sup>1</sup> to determine evidence that mass-media campaigns are effective in preventing illicit drug use. They found that, of the majority of studies relevant to be included in the review, most had no or little evidence to show that mass-media campaigns were effective in reducing drug consumption.

Previous examples of Australian public communication campaigns around drug use have led to increased stigma and misrepresentation of people who use drugs. For example, the Australian Government's \$9 million "*Ice Destroys Lives*" campaign. Douglass et al (2017)<sup>2</sup> investigated campaign recognition, drug use and behaviours among two different populations, interviewing adults who use crystal methamphetamine, and young people. They found that there was wide recognition of the campaign, but that it did not encourage help seeking; with people who use crystal methamphetamine stating that the campaign exacerbated negative labels and misrepresented their experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Allara, E., Ferri, M., Bo, A., Gasparrini, A. & Faggiano, F. 2015. *Are mass-media campaigns effective in preventing drug use? A Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis*. BMJ Open, 5. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/9/e007449>

<sup>2</sup> Douglass, C., Early, E., Wright, C., Palmer, A., Higgs, P., Quinn, B., Dietze, P. & Lim, M. 2017. "*Just not all ice users do that*": investigating perceptions and potential harms of Australia's *Ice Destroys Lives* campaign in two studies". Harm Reduction Journal, 14:45. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5513120/>

### **Identifying best practice approaches**

Best practice approaches to public communications campaigns on drug use will recognise people who use drugs as people first, without using images of them or drug use as part of 'shock advertising' campaigns. A core aim of any public campaign regarding drug use must aim to reduce the stigma around drug use and people who use drugs, encourage harm reduction practices, and promote avenues to seek help if desired.

Public communications campaigns in Australia often focus on reducing demand for drug use but should also incorporate harm reduction messaging and referral to harm reduction based services. 'Reducing harm' must be incorporated as a core aim of all future public communications campaigns.

All Australian public communications campaigns regarding drug use should follow sector and key affected population-informed guidelines for communicating about alcohol and other drug use, such as the Commonwealth Government-funded *Mindframe*<sup>3</sup> guidelines and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services commissioned 'Power of Words'<sup>4</sup> practical guide to reduce stigma and improve health outcomes of people who use drugs.

One example of a best practice mass media campaign is the Canadian 'Stop Overdose'<sup>5</sup> Campaign of the British Columbia Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, which promotes harm reduction strategies to reduce resultant harm and death from overdose. The campaign is seen across the province of British Columbia, posted from bus stops to public bathrooms. The tagline of this campaign is 'Stop the Blame. Stop the Shame. Stop the Stigma' and recognises that people who use drugs are real people (photos attached).

Finally, we would like to advise that we would welcome the opportunity to speak to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement at any hearings that may be scheduled as part of the Inquiry.

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

Yours sincerely

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Harm Reduction Australia

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<sup>3</sup> Everymind, 2019. *Mindframe for Alcohol and Other Drugs*. [https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/mindframemedia/assets/src/uploads/Mindframe\\_AOD\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/mindframemedia/assets/src/uploads/Mindframe_AOD_Guidelines.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Association of Participating Service Users/Self Help Addiction Resource Centre, Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, Harm Reduction Victoria and Penington Institute, 2019—*The Power of Words*: <https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/power-words/>

<sup>5</sup> British Columbia Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions 2019. *Stop Overdose*. <https://www.stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca/>

### Campaign Example:

Examples of advertising from the British Columbia Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions 'Stop Overdose' campaigns - <https://www.stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca/>



### Opinion Piece:

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1029633/confronting-the-meth-monster>