



Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

29 January 2021

Dear Committee Secretary

Review of the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Act 2018

We write with regard to the above review and wish to highlight our concerns regarding the potential adverse impact of the recommendation contained within the recent *Report on the conduct of the 2019 federal election and matters related thereto* (The Report) to lower the threshold for becoming a political campaigner from \$500,000, to \$100,000 in electoral expenditure.

As peak body for the Victorian Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) Sector, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) notes that knowledge based advocacy, reflecting the expertise of the sector and the experiences of service users, is vital in informing the development of government policy. The intention of engaging in advocacy in these matters is to advise government and community of optimal and pragmatic evidence based policy to maximise positive health outcomes for Australians.

Not for profit organisations, including peak bodies, aim to promote the public good and best practice evidence in policy development. To this end, engaging with politicians, Departments, the media and the broader community is undertaken in an effort to promote evidence informed policy and is not an attempt to malign specific political parties or actors.

The report's recommendation to lower the threshold for becoming a political campaigner does not appear to draw on any evidence or suggestion that the current arrangement is in anyway unsatisfactory. Any changes to the threshold will run the risk of generating further red tape for community agencies by way of an increased burden of compliance and impair the transfer of policy being informed by evidence.

It should be noted that not for profit organisations are increasingly facing an unfunded increasingly overwhelming burden of compliance across a range of areas; efforts should be made to ensure that any additions to this burden are seen as highly purposeful.

Many of the people VAADA's members support are otherwise silenced in public debate. They often have little opportunity to provide a public airing of the systemic challenges which impact their lives, with adverse populist stereotypes informing public opinion. Related to this, people experiencing AOD dependency are often stigmatised, in both private and public settings. Advocacy from AOD treatment and harm reduction agencies provides what is often a sole voice for these people. Any effort to minimise the voice of these supporting agencies will effectively lock out already marginalised cohorts from public life.

The threshold should remain at \$500,000.

About VAADA

VAADA is a non-government peak organisation representing publicly funded Victorian alcohol and other drug (AOD) services. VAADA aims to support and promote strategies that prevent and reduce the harms associated with AOD use across the Victorian community. VAADA's purpose is to ensure that the issues for people experiencing harms associated with substance use and the organisations who support them are well represented in policy, program development and public discussion.

VAADA's membership comprises agencies working in the AOD field, as well as those individuals who are involved in, or have a specific interest in, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation or research that minimises the harms caused by AOD.

We believe our written submission adequately covers our views and therefore would be happy to defer the opportunity to present further evidence to the committee to others. Should you have any queries, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Sam Biondo.

Sam Biondo
Executive Officer
VAADA