



AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC.

ABN 91 028 693 268

24 January 2020

Mr Craig Kelly MP
Chair, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: le.committee@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Kelly

Thank you to you and your committee for providing the Australian Medical Association in South Australia (AMA(SA)) the opportunity to comment on the value of public communications campaigns targeting drugs and substance abuse.

Most of the work the AMA conducts or refers to in terms of evaluating the efficacy of communications campaigns is conducted through our Federal office. In South Australia, we largely work with public, private and non-government health and medical organisations to help develop and disseminate campaigns carefully researched and designed to reach and influence their specific target audiences.

As an example, the AMA(SA) is currently a partner in the Reach For The Facts campaign (<https://reachforthefacts.com.au/>), which is led by ReturnToWorkSA (RTWSA) and which aims to persuade health practitioners, patients and carers of the dangers of prescription opioid misuse and addiction. The campaign was developed in response to the recent rise in overuse of and deaths related to opioid overdosing, including associations with increased prescribing: *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2018* shows the number of accidental deaths from overdosing rose from 903 deaths in 2002 to 1,704 deaths in 2016. The RTWSA campaign is designed to raise awareness of the potential harms of long-term use or misuse of prescription opioids, encourage questions about alternatives for safe and effective pain management, and achieve behavioural change over an extended period. Television and radio advertisements, social media, billboards, posters and brochures point consumers, family members and supporters, and health professionals to tailored information about opioids and their side effects, tools to identify dependency, information about pain and multi-modal methods of pain management.

While the campaign is in its early stages, it appears health professionals are finding its resources useful for patient education. The information is objective and non-judgemental, and strongly encourages consumers to discuss any changes to their pain medication with their doctors. The health professional pages also provide up-to-date information about prescribing and deprescribing.

The processes RTWSA and its partners undertook to develop this campaign included a survey of South Australian residents, including health professionals, and health professionals were among those included in reviews and tests of the materials.

While there is as yet no measurement of the Reach for the Facts campaign's efficacy, I suggest that the processes undertaken to develop the campaign should be the foundation

your AMA
your voice
your profession

of developing any successful campaign. A campaign must be evidence-based, up-to-date and reflect the living experiences of both the target audience and the people who will be using or pointing to it to influence behavioural change.

In addition, I suggest public communication campaigns of 2020 must be bold and truly 'speak to' the people they are designed to reach and persuade. I am aware of highly successful international campaigns that were evaluated and found to resonate strongly with their audiences, but when 'adapted' for use in other markets, including Australia, were weakened and lost the very messages that made them effective. These were not 'shock' ads, nor they 'talk down' to people; in fact, neither of these approaches has been found to have significant effect. Rather, these and other successful campaigns are designed to make viewers and readers think about the impacts of their behaviour on themselves and their loved ones. For example, the advertisements that demonstrate how a man's smoking leads to cancer, physical incapacity and eventual death are among those that remind people both of the harm their behaviour can cause to themselves and their families and that it is only through changing that behaviour that they will avoid or minimise potentially tragic impacts.

On behalf of AMA(SA) members I suggest your investigation can have important ramifications for the health and wellbeing of many Australians. I look forward to the outcome of your inquiry and hope that it leads to the development of campaigns with broad and powerful benefits for our community.

Yours sincerely

Dr Chris Moy

MB BS, FRACGP, FAMA, AMA(M)
President

CC: Marina Bowshall
State Director, Drug and Alcohol Services SA