

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
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11/12/2016

Dear Committee,

I am grateful for the opportunity to make this submission to the Inquiry into Crystal Methamphetamine. The issues I will be addressing will in the main be relating to (e) the nature, prevalence and culture of methamphetamine use in Australia, including in indigenous, regional and non-English speaking communities.

My family is very blessed to have survived the torture of a loved one being destroyed by Ice addiction. Once our son had descended into deep addiction, it was only a matter of months before every aspect of his life was decimated. He was barely able to function on any normal level, and descended into paranoid psychosis. As is inevitable, he lost everything of value in his life. Wife, child, job, house and car. We live in regional Latrobe Valley, around 160kms from Melbourne with limited access to help. Local health services could offer very little other than periodic counselling which made little to no impact at all, and following the governments harm minimisation guideline, encouraged to him to just use on weekends, which ensured continued use and exacerbated a self-defeating cycle. There is a bitter irony in advocating occasional use for illegal drugs and then ramping up police services to deal with the fallout! Whilst private rehabilitation appears extortionate at \$30,000 for 3 months, what price do we place on the life of our loved one? My son is alive today as we were fortunate enough to have the resources to get him into a residential rehabilitation as soon as he was willing to accept the help. He is once again a wonderfully functional son, father, partner, employee and member of society. Through the government system, the wait at the time was 3-6 months, in which I believe we would have been dealing with his death.

In the past couple of years, within a 120 kilometre radius of my hometown, community support groups such as The Ice Meltdown Project from Drouin and Broken Homes of Bairnsdale and District, have emerged to fill and address the needs of both the addict and the families, as help through the public sector buckled under the strain of increased need and red tape. Similarly, Australia wide, there are many other

groups that have sprung up to try to address the needs of their communities, as they too languish against slow moving bureaucracy. (Please note the list attached at the end of this submission.)

Recently I was contacted by a young Mum with a 3 month old baby, from rural Victoria, who lives 160 kms from the nearest major town. She is a daily ice user and desperate to stop using. She had been in touch with ACSO and after the initial 20 minute phone assessment was informed the next stage was an hour long assessment but not for three weeks, and she would need to travel to the major town. Following that, there was a subsequent wait of two weeks to see a counsellor, who would then look at what options were available. She sees no way out of the hell she is now living in. It is apparent there is little, if anything, to offer anyone who is extremely dysfunctional in their addiction or geographically isolated to any extent. From the NSW border to the Latrobe Valley, in fact in all rural and regional areas, the government has failed to make any type of impact regarding the ice crisis. According to a report published this month by Flinders University's National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Ice use has increased 150% in regional Australia since 2007 compared to 16% in metropolitan centres. And still regional areas are continually overlooked and underfunded! After numerous enquiries, it is my understanding that to date, not one extra residential rehabilitation bed has been made available through the Victorian Ice Action Plan. Over \$103 million investment from the taxpayers purse and not one extra residential bed! Victoria has the second highest population in the country and also recorded the highest growth rate of all states and territories at 1.9% (the Australian Bureau of Statistics) according to the recent census and yet publicly funded residential rehabilitation in Victoria, ranks second last per head of population in Australia. There appears to be a major disparity for such a heavily populated state.

	Population at end March 2016	QtrChange over previous year	Change over previous year
PRELIMINARY DATA	'000	'000	%
New South Wales	7 704.3	103.2	1.4
Victoria	6 039.1	114.9	1.9
Queensland	4 827.0	61.8	1.3
South Australia	1 706.5	9.7	0.6
Western Australia	2 613.7	29.8	1.2
Tasmania	518.5	2.2	0.4
Northern Territory	244.0	1.0	0.4
Australian Capital Territory	395.2	5.0	1.3
Australia (a)	24 051.4	327.6	1.4

Last year in Victoria, stage 1 of the State Governments Ice Action Plan was \$45.5 million, with 500 day rehabilitation programs to be implemented. I made an enquiry on 28/11/2016 through the local health service about access to the day program facility and the next intake will be mid-January, 2017 which is subsequent to an ACSO assessment, then only if the person meets the criteria and has already ceased

taking drugs!! If it were that easy for the addict to STOP taking drugs, there would be NO need for these services in any large or ongoing capacity. Importantly, much has gone to education which is vitally important as we look to the future. Stage 2 of plan is a \$57.6 million investment which includes \$6 million to develop an 18-20 bed mental health facility in the Grampians region, servicing the Ballarat community. It must be kept in mind, this investment is to *develop* a facility, not build or run it, and with no official opening date. Whilst I understand Rome was not built in a day, the snail pace bureaucracy is only serving to exacerbate an already overwhelming situation

Recently, I attended a meeting at Odyssey house, where we were informed that they have more than 10,000 pleas for help each year, and are able to help around 800. This is only one residential rehabilitation facility! Imagine how many requests for help annually go unheard due to lack of funding! The shortfall in publicly funded beds, excludes thousands of people each year from the treatment they need to recover. Whilst our health system is perennially pushed to its limit, people with other illnesses due to lifestyle choices receive treatment as often and regularly as possible. We do not tell people who have made poor lifestyle choices, which in turn leads to diabetes, stroke or heart complaints (for example), to go away, lose 30 lbs, stop overeating, smoking etc., to come back in 3-6 months time and we will treat your condition, but only if you have stopped overeating, smoking etc. They are treated with the compassion they deserve and are afforded not only advice in regards to their ailments, but respect and treatment. Not so for those who are crippled by addiction.

Many of those with substance abuse issues had pre-existing mental health problems for which they have been unable to access proper and continuous help, and those who did not have pre-existing conditions, often end up with them. Regular users are presenting with more complex issues and with significantly impaired mental health as a consequence of both short and long term methamphetamine use.

In addition, the Herald Sun, 27/11/2016, reported on the increased correlation between drug driving and the road toll. Drug driving is now the biggest killer on our roads with the Victorian Police Assistant Commissioner saying “Drug driving was more ‘prevalent’ in fatal and serious injury crashes than drink driving. In Victoria, 45 drivers killed in road crashes in 2015 had drugs in their system, compared with 26 drunk drivers. 632 drivers were seriously injured after being in a crash while high on drugs in the same year. These stats are only for Victoria and one can only imagine the carnage Australia wide. Eyewatch-Latrobe Police Service Area reported on 12/11/2016, police members from Latrobe, Bass Coast and Baw Baw Highway Patrols have detected approximately 500 drivers testing positive for drugs since April 2015. It comes as police have uncovered 106 clandestine labs so far this year, which is on track to rise above the 152 found in 2014.

November 5, 2016, the Herald Sun reported Drug crimes soared in Victoria in the past five years with drug dealing charges jumping to 5155, up from 3457. Culturing and manufacturing rose from 1388 cases to 1767. The use of drugs has also soared with more than 23,200 people caught using drugs last financial year, up from 14,066 in 2011/12.

Clearly, we are losing the war!

In conclusion:

Through my own experience and involvement with hundreds of families through the community groups I have been involved with over the last 3-4 years, it is absolutely apparent that those who were fortunate enough to enter long term residential rehabilitation programs, had far greater success rates in maintaining sobriety on returning to society. I am not suggesting it is a cure all or that other programs have no merit. People in rural and regional areas are at a constant disadvantage not only due to their geographical location, but the chronic lack of services and residential rehabilitation programs available. Day programs can be beneficial for those who have been fortunate to realize they were in trouble before descending into the pits of chronic addiction, and are also helpful for those maintaining their sobriety after long term residential rehabilitation, but in the main, fail dismally for those whose lives have become dysfunctional. Drug Addiction is not a one size fits all disease, and neither is recovery. So I beg the question: Why are those suffering from chronic addiction issues continually ignored and offered only Band-Aid treatments at best? Residential rehabilitation is the most effective and comprehensive treatment and gives the addict the best possible chance to arrest and deal with their disease and to look forward to resuming a life free from substance abuse.

Sincerely,

Sue MacManus

Community Support Groups/Facebook Support Groups

The Ice Meltdown Project Inc

Broken Homes of Bairnsdale and District

Broken Shards

360

Ice in Bunbury

Ice Diaries

Whyalla Ripples

Port Augusta Ripples

Ice Kills Our Kids

Ice Awareness and Support

Ice stole our family

Stop the new Ice Age

Cairns Ice Epidemic

Our towns Ice fight

Gippsland Fighting Ice Campaign

ICE destroys lives. Fighting together to beat this epidemic

Glenn Munso - Youth You Program

Ice Breakers Albany

A mother's call to arms against ICE

Ice not even once