



Giving voice to community drug and alcohol issues.

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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into the impact of illicit drugs on families

The *voice* committee has prepared a submission into the committee's inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families. The submission is enclosed.

Voice is a Community Advisory Council that was established as an outcome of the Western Australian 2001 Community Drug Summit. It provides a conduit between the community, the Minister for Health and government policy makers.

Voice aims to ensure that the Drug and Alcohol Office and other government agencies receive independent advice from the professional and broader community regarding drug and alcohol policy and programs and that people within our community can have a voice for their concerns on drug and alcohol issues. The membership represents a broad range of community sections.

The work of your committee should prove valuable if it achieves an increased level of awareness about the complex issues involved and provides more support for families from all sectors.

Yours sincerely

RP

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND HUMAN SERVICES
Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families
2007

SUBMISSION FROM VOICE WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Voice is a group of community members with wide ranging experience and knowledge of the drug and alcohol area which was established by the Western Australian state government to provide input into government policy on drug and alcohol policy, programs and strategies

Inquiry's Terms of Reference

The Committee shall inquire into and report on how the Australian Government can better address the impact of the importation, production, sale, use and prevention of illicit drugs on families. The Committee is particularly interested in:

1. the financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member(s) using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug induced psychoses or other mental disorders;
2. the impact of harm minimisation programs on families; and
3. ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs

***Voice* background**

Voice was established as an outcome of the WA 2001 Community Drug Summit and provides a conduit between the community, the Minister for Health and policy makers. *Voice* aims to ensure that the Drug and Alcohol Office and other government agencies receive independent advice from the professional and broader community regarding drug and alcohol policy and programs.

Voice was previously known as the Community Advisory Council but was renamed to better reflect the role and function of the group. The members come from diverse areas including Indigenous, CaLD, youth, substance users, legal sector, parents and rural and remote. *Voice* actively seeks community input into issues relating to drug and alcohol usage.

Voice has been active in a number of areas and is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

SCOPE OF THIS SUBMISSION

Voice will make comment on:

1. the terms of reference of this inquiry and the need for the inquiry to consider the impact of alcohol usage as well as illicit drug use

2. the need for more services to support families with a member who is using drugs.

PART ONE: ALCOHOL USE

It is noted that the terms of reference for this inquiry refer only to the impact of illicit drug use on families. The terms of reference do not include the impact of alcohol on families.

While it is acknowledged that different approaches may be necessary to allow for the fact that illicit drugs are illegal but alcohol is not, it would appear that issues relating to use, prevention and the impact on families apply to both alcohol use and illicit drug use.

We are advised that the impact of alcohol on the community is approximately three times that of the impact of illicit drugs. It is, therefore, not a trivial issue.

Despite this, there is a gap in service provision in the area of alcohol abuse. For example, Pre-sentence Opportunity Programs funded by the federal government specifically preclude participation by anyone with alcohol abuse issues who does not also have illicit substance abuse issues.

Further, there is a lack of ongoing guidance from a national level regarding responsible drinking habits. This issue is periodically re-launched but is not consistently or regularly addressed.

For all of these reasons, we are disappointed that the terms of reference do not include the impact of alcohol use. We encourage the Committee to recommend that its terms of reference be broadened to include alcohol, or that a separate inquiry be conducted that specifically addresses the impact of alcohol use.

PART TWO: SERVICES THAT SUPPORT FAMILIES

Voice endorses the recognition of the value in supporting Australian families to better respond to harms from illicit and other drugs. The Committee also acknowledges the relationship between families and the role and influence of risk and protective factors in relation to illicit drug use as both significant and complex. Strengthening families' abilities to prevent or respond to these influences is both a compassionate and effective way of improving the development and outcomes of future generations.

The nature of the resources available to families needs to include those which support effective prevention at the earliest opportunity and appropriate school based programs working with 'whole-school' communities.

The increasing evidence of the relationship between mental health and drug-use requires a comprehensive response which is broadly accessible, multi-

faceted and capable of responding to the complexity and often hidden impact in homes.

Family and relationship breakdown associated with illicit drug use can have a debilitating impact on the ability of families to cope or effectively respond. Practical and timely support including respite for the family is needed: appropriate residential and coercive rehabilitation facilities are frequently sought but much less frequently available.

Innovations which utilise current technology (such as internet based programs and those utilising communications technology) have been suggested and are felt to be 'culturally valid' for young people.

The view of this Committee is that families are seeking a consultative, co-ordinated and multi-faceted response across the multiple levels of drug-use harms. This requires access to a range of services which are sensitive to the needs of families including earliest intervention.