

**FOR THE ATTENTION OF MRS KAY HULL MP**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**

**INQUIRY INTO SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN AUST COMMUNITIES**

**POINTS TO BE COVERED, AND CRITERIA THEY FIT UNDER: SUMMARY**

1. *Alcohol - Family Relationships and health/welfare considerations*
2. *Drugs - Family Relationships, violence/workplace safety, health*

**DETAILED COVERAGE**

**1. Alcohol**

*1. Alcohol: Family Relationships*

One of the worst drugs in Australia would have to be alcohol, in the toll it exacts on the persons using it, families of those persons, and society in general.

Families have to put up with the shame of an alcoholic parent, the hopelessness and powerlessness to do anything about their drinking and behaviour that result, the fear of violence toward children or partner, and actual violence to those same people. The added concern for the safety of the drinker, and security of their job due to these factors, and other related concerns, can make for a sad family life.

Considering that our community is made up of families of one sort or another, these are the toll drinking to excess can have on our community. This is repeated over and over behind thousands of closed doors all over Australia.

*2. Alcohol -Health/Welfare*

Young persons become intoxicated, alcoholics or not, and embarrass themselves and others and MANY become violent. How is it that young people become this way? What would make any self respecting person lose their self respect and their concern for others and themselves and become so intoxicated that they fight, crash vehicles, hurt people emotionally and physically, do rude things they wouldn't do normally?

The answer is...a culture of alcohol consumption and alcoholism that exists in Australia. This 'grand' way of life, is passed on from generation to generation, and is becoming worse. In the current climate of prosperity a whole generation has had the means (money) and permission (their parents did the same and think its normal), to obliterate their brain, body, health, jobs and life.

What else causes this to happen?? Why the decline?

Apart from the obvious environmental factors, there are I believe deeper spiritual ones. People long for meaning, purpose, hope, and meaning in life. Also, people lose hope when in disastrous family situations, as above. It is my belief that the further our country gets away from its Christian roots, the less meaning there is to life, and the less care that can be provided to people to PREVENT lives taking the turns my father did.

### *3. Alcohol - So what can be done?*

- a. I think that the 'culture' of alcohol and the idea that actually brags about being legless, needs to be tackled full on. In the same way as some up front advertisements in the 70's lowered the road toll as awareness grew, some bare facts about alcohol, drugs, health, work and violence etc, are badly needed.
- b. Along with this and other good programs (eg school) to change the culture, I think that the encouraging of the Christian churches to play an active role in helping with the deeper meaning issues needs to be engendered. Not only by throwing money at the 'treatment' programs, but having a policy that acknowledges our Christian roots, and that the basics of a happy ordered society, comes from our Christian heritage. (E.g. how do we know murder is wrong and put it in our laws, except that it comes directly from the bible? i.e. *Thou shalt not kill*). Whilst the responsibility of a spiritual revival rests with the church, a government that is behind them would sure help. It is the deeper issues not being met that makes people restless and makes them turn to alcohol and other drugs for solace from meaninglessness, as well as from difficulties that all people face.
- c. One thing that could help Christians speak out more about important issues and let others know how to address the deeper meaning & issues, is if the atmosphere of political correctness that exists, were dismantled. People who may otherwise speak out about the benefits of Christianity, remain silent and people take the damaging options to deal with their lives. To this end, religious vilification laws are not helpful. Open debate on matters of religion, and other issues, is VITAL for people to remain healthy emotionally and to make informed decisions about what path their lives should take. The 'environment' (caused by political correctness) of not talking about religion in case someone is offended, means that by default, people will go elsewhere for help and answers to life's problems, and meaning. These other places are UNLIKELY to be places capable of dealing with alcohol issues and unlikely to understand the deeper needs that cause alcoholism, and thus the cycle continues.

### *4. Alcohol – Summary of this section:*

- a. Alcohol destroys family life, work, health, and personality.
- b. A culture that encourages this exists
- c. Prevention is better than cure
- d. Advertisements and other good programs should commence to destroy this culture.
- e. We should also encourage other ways to fill in ones life, example sport, friendship, and (see point f) church involvement. To have the latter, people need to be encouraged in our Christian Heritage as something to be proud of, upon which our nation was built, and that makes for strong nations.
- f. The Christian Church should be encouraged to be involved in helping people not only in treatment of alcohol related issues a, but providing meaning in life to all people, especially those turning to destructive solutions to their life's circumstances
- g. Political correctness and any laws that allow it to remain should, as a culture in society, be destroyed. The important aspects of eg religious vilification designed to prevent violence and abuse of other nationalities and religions eg Muslims at present, should be added to some special 'anti-terrorism/anti-ethnic violence' law, and the vilification laws removed as they only serve to cause politically correct conversation. Some people, seeking to find meaning, would be prevented from doing this by the laws that would make them feel hesitant to argue religious issues.

## 1. Drugs

### *1. Drugs – Violence & 2. Drugs - Work related violence*

Unfortunately, my comments here begin with a personal note also. Until recently I did not have a personal testimony to the damage that drugs can do. In Sep-Nov 2000 I completed a "Certificate III in Community Services (Community Work)", and found some casual employment in a Crisis-accommodation Centre for men. On Boxing Day last year, I was assaulted at work. The reason for his violent reaction of a resident, to a small request, which no one else responded to in the same way, was his usage of marijuana over a long period. This not only affects cognitive functions, but also alters personality, by (it has been proven in studies) causing depression and 'paranoia', a mental condition. I was pinned to the floor in a siege situation for 15 minutes, and have a permanent neck injury as a result. In addition to the trauma this caused me there are added costs:

#### (i) The financial Cost

The cost of this alone has been a Work-cover claim for the State Government of Victoria, costs in health to myself, payment of wages for time not worked (by my employer). A restructure at work that means I cannot get work there anymore, so welfare payments increasing to be paid to me.

#### (ii) The emotional cost and medical cost

This is repeated many times over all over the country, in violence in entertainment places, workplaces, homes, and random violent crimes in public places. Considering

the trauma this caused me, I can only imagine, but definitely understand now, the trauma some people go through.

It is ludicrous to imagine (given the proven links between severe depression and long-term use of marijuana), that people want to legalise this substance. Because it initially soothes a person, others may want to even 'give' it to people. But many who wouldn't use it normally would turn to it.

This is a worry, as people already unstable through mental illness could become quite ill if using it for prolonged times. Schizophrenia is also linked to marijuana usage.

(iii) Workplace cost

Other drugs are dangerous and possibly worse in their immediate effects, in impaired judgement, lack of ability to concentrate, and so on. I'm sure employers everywhere would be shocked to think that government policy could be supportive of the use, purchase or even condoning of such potent materials.

### 3. *Drugs – Health & Welfare*

Again, having worked in a crisis accommodation centre, among the causes of homelessness (which in turn puts a burden on the welfare budget), is drug use. It has this effect due to the actual physical effects of the drugs, the money spent on them, the culture of crime that surrounds it and the trouble that causes for users and their families. Those who live at this centre, get there, because they came to a point of not being able to properly be responsible for their lives, so that various functions in it are affected. Again the welfare agencies and government bear the cost of this and are faced with the outcomes.

### 4. *Drugs - Solutions*

- a) When drugs are less available, people use them less!! ***A policy that eliminates drugs as much as possible***

Laws need to reflect that drugs are damaging to people's lives and that Australia does not want this to be a drug culture with its related crime, nor tell future generations that to be in stupor, to not be responsible and so on, is OK, and is the way 'normal' Australians act! Or should we put Paul Hogan on TV in the USA, legless and spewing up, and saying, "come to Australia!", land of the outback, the payback, and 'watch your back', due to drug related violence.

- (i) School programs that do not 'train' people how to use drugs properly, in the process of saving drug users from being killed, by misuse!! And this, from drugs that they only learnt how to use from the 'harm minimisation' programs!!

- (ii) "Harm minimisation" should only be used among known users, by eg street welfare workers helping on the 'coalface'.
  - (iii) Education of the general public, highlighting the DANGERS (as with alcohol above), and as with drink-driving, in the 70's need to be advertised FORCEFULLY, with a view to preventing usage! The policy of government needs to be *abstinence* (especially for teens etc), with 'common sense' *harm minimisation* only to be applied with people who obviously do not wish to stop using, and will not listen to common sense about the dangers they face by continued use.
- b) As with alcohol above, the Christian Heritage we have needs to be acknowledged and encouraged by government, officially in policy, to enable the proper use of this means to address the deeper issues of people in society. To this end:
- (i) Political correctness needs to be discouraged and removed from law as a means to open up debate and discussion and provision of deeper answers to those who need it most and to all people.
  - (ii) The Christian church needs to be encouraged to speak about its unique message of hope in a land where this is its heritage.
  - (iii) Funding needs to be directed, by looking for church organizations with programs that provide deeper meaning for people, which will ultimately make people happier and less likely to turn to drugs and alcohol in times of need.

Government Policy makers need to take a trip into the real world, to see the effects first hand, of drugs in society, if they are not already aware of this.

### CONCLUSION

I do not want Australia to be less safe to live in, and be full of people whose lives are affected by drugs and alcohol, making their personal lives a misery and putting a heavy toll on the society, families, health, and finances.

*Can OUR generation make a difference, alter policy RADICALLY to eliminate drug and alcohol culture within ONE generation, and change policy to encourage solutions and a life that does not include these destructive abuses.*

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God bless you as you deliberate on these important issues!!

Yours sincerely

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