



Bronwyn Bishop MP

Chairman

House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Family & Human Services

MEDIA RELEASE

13 September 2007

Winning it for the kids: Protecting families from illicit drugs

“The war on drugs is winnable”, said Chairman Bronwyn Bishop, commenting on the findings of the House Families Committee’s inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families.

The committee found that there is a drug industry in Australia, across treatment, counselling and research organisations, which has captured the term ‘harm minimisation’ to mean policies with no moral content aimed at merely reducing illicit drug use, without the aim of making drug-using individuals drug free. Some also advocate for drug legalisation.

“Many of those who comprise the drug industry pursue private agendas several decades old and not in keeping with the latest in international research about the physical and mental health risks posed by illicit drug usage,” Mrs Bishop said.

Many in the drug industry believe that cannabis should be legalised, *The Lancet* in July 2007 admitted that its statement in 1995 that cannabis posed no risk to individuals was wrong, and it concluded that governments “would do well to invest in sustained and effective education campaigns on the risks to health of taking cannabis”.

“Australia needs a harm prevention policy to prevent young people from trying drugs in the first place, and to help those who slip into useage to have timely access to detox and rehabilitation facilities that aim to get them drug free”, said Mrs Bishop.

To this end, the committee has recommended a hard-hitting television-focussed campaign of the same reach and intensity as the anti-smoking campaign which tells young people the truth about what drugs will do to them, including the latest research on mental disease following drug use, the ageing effects of drugs on physical appearance, dental damage and decay, reduced life expectancy and indeed death, all of which bring great trauma to the drug user’s family.

Some of the most significant recommendations result from evidence given outlining the most appalling neglect and abuse of children in the care of drug-using parents. This lack of care led to children having no hope of a positive outcome in life and in some cases to child deaths.

‘The drug industry rhetoric is focused on the user to the detriment of children and other family members’, said Mrs Bishop.

“We were shocked to find that there are no statistics on what happens to children born to a drug-addict mother nor any adequate follow-up on what happens to children born addicted”, she said. “We have made recommendations to address this”.

Mrs Bishop has called for a child protection policy which is focussed on the interests of the child and combats the anti-adoption culture in state bureaucracies.

“Children who are being shunted from foster carer to parent and back, or from carer to carer, can’t afford to wait for their parents to sort themselves out”.

“Children need stable and loving homes”, said Mrs Bishop, “and adoption must be one option available to provide this”.

A foster mother of 24 years experience told the committee of two boys previously in her care, “Had they been adopted out, they could be now well on their way to being settled and having a great future”.

The committee has also recommended that the child protection reforms, introduced as part of the Government’s response to child abuse in the Northern Territory, be applied to parental drug use situations. This would mean that where a court ordered a child back to their drug-using parent, even if clean at the time of the order, the parent would not receive cash but food and clothing vouchers for the benefit of the child.

Other recommendations include:

- fund only organisations that have ultimate aim of enabling drug users to be drug free
- establish a central information and referral line for drug users and family members modelled on the Carelink service for aged care
- list naltrexone, as an effective detox and treatment agent for addiction, on the PBS
- make the ‘booze bus’ the ‘drug and booze bus’ by increasing random testing for drivers affected by illicit drugs
- review the aims and costs of the methadone program, and
- ban parents who care for or have access to their children from receiving takeaway doses of methadone.

In summary, the committee supports a continued ‘tough on drugs’ message in line with the Prime Minister’s statements on zero tolerance.

A press conference will be held in Committee Room 1R3 at 1 pm today.

For media interview: please contact Damien Jones on **0409 147 247** at the electorate office of the Committee chairman the Hon Mrs Bronwyn Bishop MP.

For further information: contact the Committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4566 or mobile 0421 051 837 or email fhs.reps@aph.gov.au or visit <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fhs/illicitdrugs/>

References: ‘Editorial’, The Lancet (2007), vol 370, 28 July, p 292; Mrs Lorraine Rowe, public hearing transcript, 15 August 2007, p 8.