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Submission to-  
Parliament of Australia,  
House of Representatives,  
Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, fhs.reps@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families

The following is a submission from our Council.

As a national body promoting more effective policies on illicit drugs we would recommend to your committee the following-

1 The financial, social and personal cost to families with members using illicit drugs.

The costs of illicit drug use are much wider to those of the immediate family. The costs to the wider community of illicit drug use are extensive. Because of the known harms of illicit drug use our Council proposes that every effort must be made to support illicit drug users to enter detoxification and rehabilitation programs that are based on the elimination of harm to the user. Accordingly, our Council recommends that Australia adopt similar policies to that used in Sweden.

- We request that your committee adopts the report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime issued in September 2006 titled 'Sweden's Successful Drug Policy: A Review of the Evidence', available from [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org) which proposes that Sweden has the most successful illicit drug policy in Europe.

- That the Australian Parliament on a bipartisan basis adopt the Swedish policy objective of making our country a drug free society in which narcotic drugs and drug use remain a marginal phenomenon.

- Medical evidence is mounting that mind altering illicit drugs are the cause of drug induced psychosis and other mental disorders.

- That the key recommendation of your committee be that the most effective assistance that can be provided to an illicit drug user and their family is to get them off drugs i.e. drug free quickly and permanently.

- That early intervention programs be aimed at the illicit drug user by providing them with detoxification and rehabilitation programs.

- We support your committee's focus on the use of illicit drugs as outlined by your inquiry reference is the key determinate of the need for rehabilitation.

- That the committee accepts the experience of Sweden that drug policy be initially aimed at teenagers because this experience indicates that a teenager that has not used an illicit by age 20 is unlikely to do so later in life.

2 The impact of harm minimization programs on families.

The harm minimization policy adopted in Australia has not been successful in reducing illicit drug use or preventing new drug use. It does not provide world's best practice.

As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report indicates, Sweden is the most successful country in Europe in reducing drug use and preventing new use.

We request that your committee compares the drug use statistics of Sweden with Australia and you will see that Australia has a long way to go. Accordingly, the harm minimization programs MUST be replaced by harm elimination programs.

Your committee's media release dated 27 February 2007 claims that illicit

drug use is estimated to cost \$6 billion.

However, the true cost to families of a member using illicit drugs cannot be calculated because it is impossible to quantify the trauma of death, damage to health, stress and loss of dignity caused in families.

This is why our Council recommends harm elimination policies based on abstinence and getting users into rehabilitation.

Illicit drug use has had a significant effect on development of an underclass in Australia.

Illicit drug use significantly alters brain function that affects short term memory causing learning difficulties making users unfit for study, training and employment.

Because harm minimization has been so unsuccessful it must be abandoned and replaced by more appropriate policies that have proven to work overseas.

3 Ways to strengthen families who are coping with members using illicit drugs

At the present time Australia families and illicit drug users are unable to access detoxification and rehabilitation programs in sufficient quality, quantity and timeliness.

In Sweden families can commit their members to rehabilitation programs. As well, Courts can direct illicit drug users into detoxification and rehabilitation which does not happen in Australia.

These enforced diversion programs assist families in helping loved ones to kick the addiction and are a great support for families.

Our Council strongly supports families being supported after rehabilitation is finished to maintain their drug free status. This can be done by financial support for community based abstinence support programs. This is essential as former illicit drug users testify that they require continuous support to assist them to stay clean.

Detoxification and rehabilitation programs must be audited to ensure they are effective in getting users off illicit drugs to ensure families will not be subject to revolving door rehabilitation.

Grandparents that are raising children of drug using parents should be recognized in the role that they undertake and be supported with government programs.

Our Council has many more policies that would be of significance in reducing the numbers of illicit drug users in our community, however your inquiry terms of reference are so limited that these have not been submitted to you but are available from our web page at [www.daca.org.au](http://www.daca.org.au)

Yours sincerely,

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