

20 February 2007

Standing Committee on Family and Human Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members

I write in reference to the inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families.

I urge you to recommend the maintenance and expansion of the policy of harm reduction. I would argue for an illicit drugs policy centred on people rather than the drugs themselves: the fundamental performance indicator of policies is thus not the amount of drugs imported or used in Australia, but the harm reduced. The focus may therefore be on avoidance or reduction of:

- death of users
- ill health of users
- perpetuation of users' habits, which they may give up when motivated to do so
- crime by users, especially theft to finance a habit
- risk to the public at large.

This situation re the last point will be improved by the maintenance and expansion of a program of medically supervised injecting centres. I am aware of calls for the closure of the centre in Kings Cross, Sydney: the public will have little reason to be grateful if closure leads to increased numbers of dangerous needles lying around.

I gained experience in the drugs arena working as Field Adviser for the United Nations International Drug Control Program, a predecessor body of the present UN Office on Drugs and Crime. I am the author of two papers:

- "Squeezing the Balloon, International Drug Policy" (*Drug and Alcohol Review* (1995) 14, 311-316)
- "Troublesome Boomerang: Illicit Drugs Policy and Security" (*Security Dialogue*, volume 28, number 3, September 1997)

These papers argue that the "war on drugs" is a failure and that alternative policies, notably harm reduction, should be pursued. My experience as a volunteer counsellor over many years supports this view.

Yours sincerely

[signed]

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Copy: Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.