

WASUA

519 MURRAY STREET
WEST PERTH WA 6000

Submission No: 113

Supp to Sub:

AUTHORISED: *KS*

9/5/07

23rd March 2007

Clerk Assistant (Committees)
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To whom it may concern

Re: Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families.

Please find herein the submission to the above inquiry from the Western Australian Substance Users Association (WASUA).

WASUA has responded to Terms of Reference #2 "Impact of Harm Minimisation programs on families".

WASUA also supports the submission to the inquiry from the Australian Illicit Drug User Organisation, AIVL.

A hard copy of WASUA's submission has also been posted.

For further information or clarification on the enclosed submission please contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully

Sandra Fox
Manager

Encl: Submission: Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families.

PH: 08 9321 2877 FAX: 08 9321 4377 EMAIL: info@wasua.com.au

Standing Committee on Family and Human Services
Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families.

Response to Terms of Reference #2
"Impact of Harm Minimisation programs on families"

The Western Australian Substance Users Association (WASUA) has been operating for 10 years and delivers a range of health and harm reduction services that form the cornerstone of preventing and reducing the transmission of blood borne viruses (BBV) and other drug related harm amongst people who use illicit substances, their families and the broader Western Australian community.

WASUA's primary aim is to improve the health and social circumstances of people who use illicit drugs working within a social health and community development framework underpinned by the principles of harm reduction and peer education. WASUA provides a voice for drug users on issues that impact them and advocates for individuals, family members / significant others.

Australia has been recognized as a world leader in addressing the harm associated with the use of illicit drugs and the Needle Syringe Program is perhaps the most renowned of the successes of the Harm Reduction stream of Australia's Harm Minimization Policy. No more is this evidenced than in the "Return on Investment in Needle & Syringe Programs in Australia", 2002, a Commonwealth of Australia publication.

Harm reduction programs have demonstrated effectiveness in engaging people and implementing behaviour change. The level of access to NSPs Australia-wide is a clear indication that injecting drug users want to protect their health and take this responsibility seriously

WASUA is a key point of access for drug users to a range of services and information which can be of use to them. Services include a health clinic for blood borne virus (BBV) testing, hepatitis A&B vaccinations, general health information and referrals; fixed site and mobile, one for one needle/syringe exchange programs (NSEP) in the inner city and south west region; peer education and resources on hepatitis C, on safe disposal of injecting equipment and safer drug use and safe sex. We work with people to reduce the harm that may be associated with the drugs that they are using and the way in which they are using them. We provide supported referral to drug treatment, legal, social welfare, accommodation and other health services. Key service components are WASUA's outreach peer education, advocacy and support service for people who inject opiates and amphetamine type stimulants and their families. WASUA also offers training and education tailored to the alcohol and other drug sector, health and social services, community groups and educational institutes.

Often the fear of discrimination by some health providers and agencies makes many illicit drug users reluctant to access such services. WASUA's peer based philosophy and user friendly service enhance our engagement with drug users who subsequently feel more comfortable and "safer" in disclosing issues concerning their drug use. In turn this enables us to respond with meaningful and appropriate support and guidance. It is by the dissemination of reliable information through peer networks that many of the harms associated with illicit drug use can be dramatically reduced.

For example it is critical that young people are aware that if something goes seriously wrong with a friend who has consumed illicit drugs that emergency services should be immediately contacted; call an ambulance or contact someone to transport the person to hospital. Many younger drug users think that calling an ambulance in an overdose situation will result in police attending and lives have been lost because of this false belief.

WASUA regularly receives calls from parents worried about their child's or other family member's drug use. Parents report feeling confused and threatened by the knowledge that their son/daughter (or other family member) is using an illicit drug; often the media is cited as being their primary source of information. A number of WASUA staff have personal experience of illicit drug use and have worked through these issues, many with the support of their families. Being able to draw on personal experience and offer peer support is one of WASUA's key strengths. WASUA provides an insight for parents or other family members into the world of illicit drug use that is often beyond the ken of health professionals.

WASUA does not condone the use of illicit drugs but recognizes that illicit drug use is a reality; attempts to stamp it out with increasingly harsher penalties have failed and are often counter productive to addressing the health and social issues concerning the use of illicit drugs. Currently about 70% of "drugs" funding is allocated to law enforcement. A more equitable distribution of funds would likely go a long way in producing improved outcomes for individuals, families, communities and our society generally.

As one of WASUA's service users said, "Governments should have greater faith in human nature and people's ability to manage their lives rather than this overwhelming reliance on law enforcement to 'solve our drug problem'". WASUA concurs; such a position would reinstate people's capacity for self determination and empowerment and improve self esteem and confidence that too often become a casualty of the stigma and discrimination targeted towards drug users.