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

Submission on Behalf of Nar Anon Family Groups
to the Inquiry into the Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your inquiry on the Impact of illicit drug Use on Families. It means a great deal to families to be heard in this forum as we often feel left out of any discussion or process examining solutions or ways of managing the difficulties associated with substance abuse in our society.

Drug abuse, be it illicit, prescription or alcohol spans all socio economic levels of our society. It is not just a problem existing only in stereotyped groups of wrong doers.

Nar Anon Family Groups

I write on behalf of the Nar Anon Family Groups which are self help support groups for families and friends whose lives are affected by the drug abuse in a loved one.

Nar Anon is an anonymous fellowship based on a 12 Step Program, which assists families in coping with their lives that have often become unmanageable through the addiction in another family member.

Purpose Of Nar Anon

We aim to support families as they learn about addiction, as they come to terms with the trauma and distress caused by the addiction in their user, and to help them to regain a degree of serenity and happiness.

A further aim is to encourage understanding, caring support and changed attitudes towards the addict in an Endeavour to improve the family situation. This can help the drug abuser and can possibly contribute towards the drug abuser's own recovery.





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It is our experience to note that many substance abusers are often the brightest, most creative, sensitive and beautiful people among us and they often succumb to drug abuse and addiction through difficulties with life pressures and traumas. They are then destined to be stigmatized, vilified and brushed aside by a society governed by fear and ignorance. In this way we lose some of the best and brightest of our young stars.

Addiction as an Illness

Drug abuse is coming to be considered as a disease of the body, mind and spirit. Mental illness is now accepted as a dysfunction. We would not reject a person with diabetes for instance, neither do we reject the drug abuser, but we seek to understand and continue to care for the addict in this illness.

We consider drug addiction to be a family illness, by which we mean it affects the whole family.

How the Family Groups Work Nar Anon

Nar Anon began in Australia in 1982 and functions in a similar way to other organizations that provide comfort, support and guidance by utilizing the effective 12 step program. Some of those organizations include Alcoholics Anonymous, for alcoholics; Al Anon Family Groups, for the families of alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, for drug abusers.

Whilst Nar Anon meetings provide guidance through sharing common experience, we do not give advice to individual people on specific problems. By listening to other people's experiences, individuals can take what is applicable to their circumstances and disregard the rest. This may help in identifying options and making independent decisions.

Relating to day to day experiences is important to gain an understanding of drug abuse and how to handle difficult situations. However, in the long term, the emphasis of the program is to learn how to increase the quality of life for the family, how to detach from the addict and give them a chance to take responsibility for their own lives.



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Literature and Slogans and Working Philosophy

While 12 step programs embrace the concept of a Higher Power giving strength to the endeavors of recovery, we do not subscribe to any one religion or denomination of religion, rather allowing individuals to make their own Spiritual choice and connection.

We have literature which is mainly in anecdotal form on how the quality of lives can be improved while living with an addict. We have small books such as "One Day at a Time" and "courage to Change" that have readings for each day that many people find a great adjunct to their daily challenges.

Our Traditions, Anonymity, Controversy, Affiliation, Co operation

Anonymity is of paramount importance to maintain public confidence in the fellowship; important for the family and the drug user.

We do not engage in controversy on any issue whatsoever (particularly social and legal issues related to drugs). Once again this is to prevent partisanship from overtaking our core endeavors.

We are not affiliated with any other organizations and are entirely self funded through our own voluntary contributions, hence protecting independence. However, we do struggle in this regard and are not a wealthy organization by any means.

We co operate with other organizations such as Narcotics Anonymous, professional counselors, Community Health Centres, Drug and Alcohol Services, etc. Quite frequently professional organizations and counselors refer friends and relatives of addicts to Nar Anon for ongoing care and support after they have received professional counseling. We are a self help fellowship and as such we do not replace professional counseling or compete with professionals in any way.

A powerful example of the co operation we have, especially with NA is that annually, we hold a day where we invite recovering addicts to come and share their stories with us and where we share the family experience with them.

This day is always one of inspiration and growing awareness for both sides of the difficulties and struggles of living with drug addiction. The amazing stories of courage in the face of incredible odds, rivals those of our best heroes in all fields. The struggle out of addiction is not for the faint hearted...it takes the strongest courage, fortitude and endurance as it is not over for many years. This is why families need and are grateful for the ongoing support and shared comfort that Nar Anon offers.



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Nar Anon helps individuals identify various courses of action in conflicting situations.
We help people identify the options available when decisions are needed.

Typical Experiences Discussed at Meetings.

- Understanding the effect addiction has on the family
- Day to day situations and crises
- Personality changes in the drug abuser
- The behaviour of the addict
- Living with the effect of drug abuse
- Caring support and the drug abuser
- Confrontations and ultimatums
- Denial, tough love, enabling
- The addict's debts
- The attitude of friends and relatives
- Living with a recovering addict

The most important outcomes for the family and friends of addicts include:

- Commencing their own recovery from the anguish and distress through the care and support of others in the group
- Learning to detach from the drug abuser in ways that are positive and stop their lives and finances being entangled and entwined with that of the addict.
- Starting to gain a measure of serenity and even happiness.



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Harm Minimisation

Nar Anon supports Harm Minimisation Programs and believes that there are vastly insufficient funds put into facilities, programs and treatment options.

Many addicts attempt many times to overcome their addictions, and they have incredibly difficult times trying to find Rehabilitation beds after Detoxification. It can take literally weeks for them to keep ringing Rehabilitation Centres, daily, to find a bed. No wonder so many relapse and can end up overdosing and sometimes dying.

The great majority of drug and alcohol abusers do not choose this extremely difficult and negative lifestyle; they are victims of the illness and when they make the courageous stand to come out of the hell they are in, there is precious little assistance and support.

Nar Anon sees the outcome of this heartache in the families and there is a great deal of frustration, disempowerment, loss of confidence and real grief in the community over the lack of care and understanding of this enormous social problem.

Many thousand of Australian families of the whole spectrum are currently struggling with the shock and trauma of discovering that a loved member of their own is suffering from substance abuse.

The dislocation of these families has long term negative effects on all areas of functionality in the community, including the Economy and especially the Health System and Social Security System.

We entreat the Committee to work on the behalf of the many thousands of good Australian families of all backgrounds, ethnicities and colours to rectify the balance between the Law and Order attitudes and funding to a more realistic, compassionate, and generous footing.

Once again, thank you for this great opportunity to put forward this submission for consideration. Nar Anon send best wishes to the committee in their deliberations, and hope that all Australians will benefit from the outcomes of this important Inquiry.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs Lynne Young

Secretary,
Nar Anon Family Groups.