



DRUG FREE AUSTRALIA



Our Vision: *Communities are well-informed about the harms of illicit drugs and empowered with anti-drug strategies*

NATIONAL OFFICE
PO Box 497
Elizabeth SA 5112

Ph: 08 8287 6815
Fax: 08 8255 2768
admin@drugfreeaustralia.org.au

Drug Free Australia Limited
A.C.N. 102 169 139
ABN: 98 102 169 139

Media contacts

Gary Christian -
(02) 9489 5488
0407 163 773

Craig Thompson
0412 722 589

Josephine Baxter
0403 334 002

Maj. Brian Watters
0400 780 509

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Harm Minimisation – Where is Australia’s Drug Policy headed?

It’s all too common these days. In our newspapers, on talk back radio and television - in fact, with just about any one you speak to, there is a sad story of devastated lives because of drug abuse.

There are, of course, a few success stories. Those people lucky enough to have been able to get help; those who have taken the long hard journey towards rehabilitation. But for most, drug addiction is a road to nowhere – the point of no return.

How did it get this bad? How did we get to a point where, according to recent research by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Australia’s drug addiction rates have exceeded those of the United States?

For example:

- 1 in 5 Australian males aged between 18-24 confessed to having a drinking problem
- 30% Australians admitted to having a drug problem compared to 6.5% of Americans
- Majority of illicit drug use is cannabis

For years, we have accepted a campaign of ‘Harm Minimisation’, and for years, the trends have worsened. Would we persist with a policy on diphtheria, if more people were contracting it, and dying after 20 years?

We have allowed terms to be bandied around such as ‘recreational drugs’. Such terms have become synonymous with the so-called ‘soft’ drugs (ie. cannabis or the ‘party drug’ ecstasy). Both of these have been identified in current research as being far from harmless, and likely to cause serious mental health problems.

Other research clearly provides examples of the warning signs –

- Rapid growth in methamphetamine use – indicated by the ACC Report (2003-2004) showing an alarmingly high total national increase in clandestine laboratory detections between 1996 and 2004.
- Prevalence of use of Ecstasy in Australia (both casual and regular use) has increased substantially. (Source – NSW Party Drugs Trends 2001, NDARC Technical No.136)

It is time that we became serious about Harm Prevention. We need a much greater focus on education and community awareness campaigns. People’s lives are at stake – and so is the immediate and long term impact on our quality of life in Australia. Is ‘tolerating the intolerable’ preferable to zero tolerance of illicit drug use?