

Drug Free Australia’s ‘Towards Healthier Schools’ - Project Phase 2 - September 2018:

Aim: At a DFA board meeting in November 2018, it was decided to focus the project to actively promote a **change in culture** in schools from one of ‘harm minimisation’ to that **primary prevention**. As is evidenced in the success of long term campaigns such as ‘**Sun Smart**’, the ‘**Quit**’ Tobacco and now the emergence of a **National Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Strategy**, generational culture change can occur - using a **top-down approach**, supported by educational resources, prevention policies and school involvement.



<https://www.nofasd.org.au/service-providers/national-fasd-strategy-2018-2028/>

Methodology – Changing the culture to Primary Prevention:

- Arrange meetings in State and Territory jurisdictions with Departments of Education, Boards of Study and Ministers of Education. Letters have been sent to all State/Territory Ministers of Education (and Shadow Ministers), with the first meeting scheduled on 15th February in Darwin with the Northern Territory Board of Studies (NTBOS). In addition we are presenting to the NT Parliamentary Select Committee on Harm Reduction, to push back against drug decriminalisation.
- Continue to review the Federally funded ‘**Positive Choices**’ website portal being promoted to all schools nationally.
- Continue to promote effective prevention programs to schools that currently do not offer them and to direct funds as financial incentives to those schools that may need assistance, using the education providers listed on the DFA website. Continue in the current school jurisdictions and expand into Queensland, NT, WA and AC, building on the database of schools.

Rationale:

Australia’s increasing drug use rates are testimony to over 30 years of Harm Minimisation. This policy focuses away from primary prevention and concentrates on treatment, (but not necessarily rehabilitation). Substitute drugs like methadone can be abused and people can develop a dual addiction with heroin; injecting rooms can encourage experimentation by new users and pill testing simply ‘normalizes’ drug use and gives permission for young people to use harmful substances.

Harm Minimisation can be likened to an ‘**ambulance at the bottom of a cliff**’ approach and does not address the basic problem of illicit drugs. They are controlled because they are harmful.

Without a top level, national approach to **changing the culture to one of ‘primary prevention’**, problem alcohol and drug use will only increase, as will the burden of disease, family and community violence and the road carnage we are already experiencing



How do we know that putting prevention first could work?

Apart from the educational campaigns (using schools) mentioned previously (QUIT, SunSmart and FASD), there are well documented examples of countries that have successfully reduced youth drug use by building a resilient culture of demand reduction; early intervention and family support.

Two examples are:

- Sweden - https://www.government.se/496f5b/contentassets/89b85401ed204484832fb1808cad6012/rk_21164_broschyr_narkotika_a4_en_3_tillg.pdf
- Iceland - <https://www.dfaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Iceland-Succeeds-at-Reversing-Teenage-Substance-Abuse2016.pdf>

There are also jurisdictions where the implementation of effective preventative alcohol and drug education has significantly reduced substance use.

For example: Life Skills Training (LST) in the United States has evaluated the following:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4050678/>

NB: None of the above countries/jurisdictions have decriminalized drugs – thus keeping the deterrent to help prevent harm.

Without knowing the reality of harms of these substances, young people, their families & teachers are not being adequately equipped with the knowledge & skills to make healthy life choices around alcohol & drugs

