

The Secretary  
Legal and Social Issues Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

SUBMISSION BY MSIC'S CONSUMER ACTION GROUP FOR THE INQUIRY INTO THE DRUGS, POISONS AND CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT (PILOT MEDICALLY SUPERVISED INJECTING CENTRE) BILL 2017

## BACKGROUND

Consumer participation involvement in health care service delivery has been occurring for the past three decades and is considered gold standard in contemporary health care. The MSIC Consumer Action Group (CAG) was formed in June 2015 and consists of eight consumers and five staff who meet monthly to discuss and plan activities that will enhance consumers' involvement in Sydney MSIC service delivery.

MSIC's Consumer Action Group has designed a T-shirt to promote the group. The members have successfully lobbied for a police liaison officer to improve their relationship with the police and so that there is an avenue of redress when MSIC consumers have complaints. The Consumer Action Group have attended a safer injecting course so they can teach their peers the safest ways to inject; and a consumer and a staff member have presented the achievements of the group at an academic conference. MSIC's Consumer Action Group also provided a submission for the statutory review of Sydney MSIC's operating conditions.

Most importantly the MSIC Consumer Action Group has given a voice to MSIC consumers, who are some of societies most marginalized and stigmatized people.

MSIC Consumer Action Group believe that the consumers' views should be included in the Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017 as they have first hand experience of what it is like to attend a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre.

The Consumer Action Group acknowledges that they do not represent all of MSIC consumers' views. Therefore, the Consumer Action Group provided questionnaires to others who are not in the group to express their opinions about the inquiry.

The following document outlines the Consumer Action Group's submission for the inquiry.

**Please note these views are forwarded on behalf of the Consumer Action Group but do not necessarily represent, or align, with the views of all MSIC consumers and/or the views of Sydney MSIC Management and Staff.**

### **Do you think a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre Trial should be established in North Richmond, Melbourne?**

#### **Feedback provided by a consumer who lived in Melbourne and had knowledge of the issues relating to injecting drug use in the North Richmond area:**

*“Yes - Location wise a lot of gear gets used in that area. It would save lives of people who inject drugs. Give people ACCESS to clean equipment to reduce Blood Borne Viruses and reduce harm to their bodies. It would be GOOD for the community to have safer place to do it, rather than in public places that children might be near”*

#### **Feedback provided by members of MSIC’s Consumer Action Group:**

*“Yes - The proof is in the pudding! What are there 102 – 106 injecting centres around the globe? The statistics prove all the reasons why there should be more of these centres, Melbourne in particular – like Kings Cross is in desperate need of this for the greater good. IT HAS TO BE DONE.”*

*“It would reduce street drug use. It’s cleaned up Kings Cross, Kings Cross has changed since the MSIC and it would do the same in Melbourne. It was really bad in the day, before the MSIC the previous “injecting centres” were unlicensed and linked to the sex industry, you had to get a girl to score for you and then pay for a girl to use the room and shoot up, it was real sleazy before. It’s worked in NSW and will work in Victoria!”*

#### **Other Consumers of MSIC offered their supportive views of establishing a MSIC trial in Melbourne:**

*“It is needed as much as Sydney’s. The one in Sydney has saved lives, it is something that I’ve seen at Sydney MSIC”*

*“I feel the people of Melbourne deserve it. It saves lives and helps treatment”*

*“It saves lives, limits effects on local businesses (i.e. no ODs behind shops), frees up police and medical services, and stops and limits BBVs”*

*“Yes – but should be placed away from exclusive Suburban Environment”*

### **Can you describe what the benefits of attending Sydney MSIC have been to you personally?**

#### **Feedback from members of MSICs Consumer Action Group:**

*“It has saved my life continually from overdose to other not so associated medical problems. MSIC made all the moves needed as well as offer the support I did need to be able to succeed in rehabilitating my soul from alcohol abuse / addiction”*

*“Saved my life, increased my quality of life and referrals to services”*

*“It’s provided a place where I can safely inject, they’ve managed my overdose when I had reduced tolerance – more than that the staff made the first assessment of my needs when I wasn’t in a place to do it myself, they referred me to pain management, Kirketon Road Centre, and detox which was the first stepping stone to rehab. There are social benefits too - mixing with staff and consumers. Drug users are usually socially isolated so by coming here you can find out what’s on in the area. MSIC also has links to other services such as drug health, housing assistance, dental and optometrist services – they saved me loads of money on my bifocals! MSIC connects consumers to other services”*

**MSIC's consumers provided the following comments:**

*"I have overdosed many times – more times than I can remember and they saved me every time, and the staff here are so helpful in many ways"*

*"Peace and quiet get to kick back after having a shot. You don't get charged with consorting charges in the MSIC and avoid stop and search charges from the police"*

*"Referrals to health services and being treated with dignity and respect"*

*"Safety, education, clean and new equipment, referrals when required"*

**Has attending the Sydney MSIC increased your access to other health services?**

*"Yes, as a chronic pain sufferer and chemically dependent in other spheres of living, I have become of increased openness to accessing physical and mental health services – primarily through attending and conversing with staff at Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre"*

*"Yes, mental health at St Vincent's Hospital, private drug treatment and dental and physical health services"*

*"Yes. Dental, optical, and referral to psychologist - This worked out very well!"*

*"Yes, Referral to Methadone Maintenance Program"*

*"Yes I had an awful infection before and staff referred me to Kirketon Road Centre, if the staff weren't there to remind us I may not have gone and got it sorted. The MSIC staff are great, especially for new users who aren't going to go to a GP and show them an injecting abscess on their arm-they can educate them about injecting safely"*

*"Yes – Rehab!"*

**What would life be like for you without Sydney MSIC?**

*"Like it is for me in Melbourne. HARMFUL, anxiety inducing, stressful using!"*

*"Would be dead or Hepatitis B, C, or HIV positive"*

*"Harder! I would not know about injecting, health (physical and mental). I would not have an understanding of the laws around administration and self-administration etc. Further the extraneous activities / conferences etc. and increased level of understanding"*

*"I would be undercover from the police (and bigoted citizens), frightened, more like the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"*

*"It would be a lot more disorganised -Thanks!"*

*"Probably wouldn't be here-death most likely. These days I'm no longer using but I remember I came out of detox and came to MSIC to use and overdosed, the staff stopped me overdosing. If MSIC wasn't here it would be linked back into the sex industry, and you used to have to pay to use the room to inject-how would homeless people pay \$40 to use a room? They wouldn't they'd have to do it in a back lane"*

*"Horrible to say the very least!"*



**Do you have any suggestions for MSIC service improvement / any other comments?**

*"Need more MSIC services in other areas!"*

*"By keeping up the hard-endless work they do now and by continually keeping in touch with the morphing ways of the lives of the intravenous drug user"*

*"The MSIC should do outreach stuff. Have nursing staff and a paid peer position to go to Jails, Rehabs, and NSPs to provide education and information sessions. The outreach positions could also do political advocacy to open injecting centres in Wellington, Western Suburbs (Sydney), and any other areas that have issues with injecting drug use. Injecting centres also increase employment opportunities for local people"*

*"Please open a similar centre in Melbourne. It is needed - I believe that the main thing is that it saves lives and refers people for medical, educational or whatever they need"*

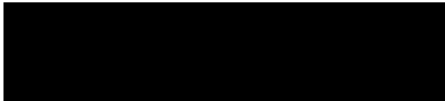
*"It will save lives, and turn affected suburbs around i.e. Richmond. Won't have people dying behind shops, needles everywhere which affect shop owners, consumers etc."*

*"I think you would have less resistance if it was placed in semi-urban area. Think about the placement of the centre in Melbourne. It was really off-putting having tabloid press hanging around outside! I think police have also become over-active in policing the area and send people away (in Kings Cross). I suggest educating local police about the benefits of an MSIC"*

**In summary all of the respondents strongly supported the implementation of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre Trial be instated in Melbourne, Victoria**

The MSIC Consumer Action Group and MSIC's Consumers thank you, and greatly appreciate you taking their views around this matter into consideration.

Yours Sincerely



**Kate Hocknull (Forwarding on behalf of MSICs Consumer Action Group)**

Mental Health Nurse Coordinator (Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre)