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From: Greg Hordacre [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 17 March 2017 2:41 PM
To: LRRCS
Subject: submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Dear Committee

Please find the following personal statement as my submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform:

My partner and I were thrilled to purchase a property in Abbotsford almost a year ago. Our research showed Abbotsford as the location that best served our needs and interests in Melbourne. Great street life, fabulous community, proximity to the city and at the centre of public transport hub ready to bus, train or tram you in every direction.

We knew that there are issues around the drug culture near Victoria St, but I'd lived in Kings Cross in the 80's/90's and thought I'd seen it all, wrong!

The proximity to city and public transport, what attracted us to Abbotsford, bring many people to this area. It has also created a nexus for drug exchange. An easily accessible spot where drug deals can be done among the fluid comings and goings of a cosmopolitan strip. Anywhere within 5 minutes walk from Victoria St becomes a spot for injecting.

Everything about the continuum of the local drug culture seems to have grown and spread and gone completely unchecked, to the point where its natural extension, the waste and human excrement builds up in lanes and vacant lots, also ignored by local authorities. On the whole it appears that no-one wants to take responsibility and it is left to those that live here, the residents to arc up again and again. And when there is no response from authorities I see elderly people picking up syringes because they have public safety concerns, children learning to ignore collapsed people on footpaths, residents unable to access their parked cars while someone injects themselves.

Residents seem to be relied on as the first response to illegal activity and medical emergencies. Imagine if authorities took this same approach to roads in our state, gave up keeping them functional and in good repair, just let them deteriorate until complaints began to stay up, and waited for local residents to be the first response to road accidents. This is what life has become for so many residents around Victoria St. The impact is on our lives, it is unseen, it weighs heavily, it creates stress, it is unreasonable, it impacts heavily on wellbeing.

Coming across people taking drugs in the laneways, garages, front verandahs and doorways of people's homes was once sporadic, it has become a daily experience for us individually. Each and every one of my neighbours in my area witness drug taking and the results of this issue EVERY DAY. This has been at the same time that political talk of getting tough on crime, proposing CCTV and actual increased presence. People will continue to take drugs, they just go to new areas where the police don't patrol - those laneways, garages, front verandahs and doorways of people's homes. Unfortunately these areas are out of sight for health workers too (and I've heard that their resources have been cut, so their overall capacity to provide assistance on the street has also been limited), so the first to come across overdosing are often the residents.

People using drugs are part of our community, they populate our streets, yards and gutters and are not going away. There is a health issue, not law and order. They are as embarrassed by their predicament as residents are in constantly coming across them. My partner and I have spoken to them when we encounter them. They are real people who respond openly to anyone showing care, interest and respect. They are self medicating, escaping pain from physical and emotional trauma because they have been unable to get the care they otherwise need. They

don't want to be in the situation they are in as much as we don't like seeing anyone doing it hard. But unlike others in our community, they feel on the outside and that they don't have a place they can go or the support they need.

A fair and just community should not leave any person in a squalid condition. Residents have no experience in 'what to do'. We are not trained in counselling, first aid, emergency response.

I have listened to the stories from those in the drug culture. I can't imagine what it's like to have such a compulsion that I would abandon my personal dignity and find myself living, sleeping, administering drugs, defecating in public places and on people's property. But that is the life they have, and through no fault of ours, residents are living with this, trying to work together to find a solution to assist the safety and amenity of our streets for all. I hear the tough talk used to solve this, but threats will only continue to displace the problems and issues.

I want real sustainable solutions that restore dignity and humanity and make the areas around Victoria St strong and vibrant. I believe a medically supervised injecting centre is one of many solutions required. It is one that all the people I have spoken to who take drugs say they want. It is needed, it will provide real and tangible solutions and positive impacts for all. It will give tremendous relief to all involved from those caught in the drug taking spiral, to the residents and services.

In a time where politicians are prepared to re-think policy based on their personal experiences, why should we have to wait for one of their children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews to overdose? Isn't it about value of every person's life? Meanwhile nothing of substance is happening, as if the people who live, work and visit Abbotsford and Richmond don't matter. People are dying and it is preventable.

Greg Hordacre

