



HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.

(Reg. No. A0020272M)

*Affiliated with the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS) and
the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) London, UK*

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Executive Officer
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
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cc: The Premier, Fiona Patten MLC

**LRRCSC - INQUIRY INTO DRUG LAW REFORM
RECEIVED 17 MAR 2017
SUBMISSION NO. 184**

Dear Sir or Madam,

Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Term of Reference No. 1 – The effectiveness of laws, procedures and regulations relating to illicit and synthetic drugs.

Victorian Humanists strongly urge that drug use be redefined as a health and social issue, rather than a law enforcement issue. It is well known that the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory governments allocated around two-thirds of drug expenditure on law reinforcement, with only 9% for prevention, 21% for drug treatment and only 2% for harm reduction during 2009-2010.¹ As all evidence indicates that after years of this emphasis on law enforcement, the illicit drug market in Australia has expanded, the time for a new approach is long overdue.

As a result of the National Ice Taskforce Report in 2015 the Commonwealth government will strengthen funding to treatment facilities and Addiction Medicine, and this is to be applauded.

However, harm minimisation remains a paramount concern. The action needed in this arena frequently challenges and disturbs community beliefs. Providing clean needles and a safe injecting space may appear to cater to an illicit lifestyle, rather than offer an opportunity to limit infection, support and counsel and reduce the risk of fortuitous needlestick injury.

Term of Reference No. 2 – The practice of other Australian States.

We Victorian Humanists here express our concern about the State Government's reluctance to implement a service which has been proved to reduce the harm to injecting drug users and save their lives.

Supervised injecting facilities have been in operation at Sydney's King's Cross for sixteen years and for more than eighty years overseas. Each facility provides sterile injecting equipment and its safe disposal, on-site medical and counselling services, means of treating overdoses and referral to drug rehabilitation services. The results are significant reductions in mortality, morbidity and hospitalization and therefore savings to the health budget. There is now extensive data, including an independent review by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre showing positive results.

At the King's Cross Centre more than six thousand overdoses have been managed without a fatality; over one million safe injections have been supervised, enabling a reduction in the spread of Hepatitis-C and HIV.

We are impressed by the evidence given to the Coroners' Court of Victoria by Dr Marianne Jauncey, the medical director of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in King's Cross. At the inquest of a young mother who died following a drug overdose, Dr Jauncey offered her opinion that such a death would not have occurred if a supervised injecting centre had been available.

The introduction of such a facility in Victoria is supported by the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of Physicians, Victoria Police, Ambulance Services and the Yarra Council, as well as the Coroner. Nationally, surveys reveal growing public support for the supervised approach.

We urge the Victorian Government to provide this vital service.

As a further step towards redefining drug use as a health and social, rather than law enforcement issue, we recommend that the state government investigates the gradual decriminalisation of drug use. The positive experience from Portugal where illicit drugs were decriminalised in 2001, ought to be examined as a model to follow.²

About the Humanist Society of Victoria (HSV)

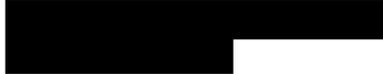
HSV is a secular organisation, formed in 1961, whose members foster an ethical, reasoned and responsible approach to life. Humanists support human rights, democratic processes, and just and inclusive governance. HSV advocates the alleviation of suffering, the promotion of well-being and the circumstances where all individuals can attain their full potential. It engages in educational, counselling and charitable activities.

The views presented here have been formulated at specially convened group discussions to which all members are invited. Further supportive information is obtained from print publications, the Internet, public lectures and from individuals with relevant expertise.

This concludes the submission.

Yours faithfully,

Roslyn Ives
President



References

1. Figures from financial year 2009-10, as cited in 'Beyond ice: rethinking Australia's approach to illicit drugs', *Medical Journal of Australia* 206 (2017).
2. 'Drugs in Portugal: Did decriminalization work?', Maia Szalavitz, *Time* magazine, 26 April 2009.