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From: Inquiry into Drug Law Reform [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 17 March 2017 7:17 PM
To: LRRSC
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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To whom it may concern,
Drug law reform is a broad and complicated area of public policy. The main point that I would like to stress in my submission is that evidence based policy should trump emotional arguments, knee jerk reactions and populism. We must learn from our failures and successes, and from those of other jurisdictions across the nation and the world.

Prohibition and heavy handed law enforcement tactics have not worked historically, and they continue to inflict a great deal of harm at all levels of society. Prohibition has had the unintended side effect of creating a highly profitable criminal marketplace which is completely unregulated and completely untaxed. The development and distribution of stronger drugs and stronger forms of drugs has been incentivised (via increased profit margins), such as fentanyl, which is 50-100 times as strong as morphine, and W-18, which is purportedly up to 10,000 times as strong as morphine, which has led to much greater chances of overdose (and thanks to the lack of regulation, such drugs could be a contaminant in something labelled as another substance altogether). Other consequences include the reluctance of people with substance abuse problems to seek medical help for fear of being tied up in the criminal justice system. Others may fail to call an ambulance upon witnessing an overdose for fear of being arrested, or may instruct others not to call an ambulance on their behalf for the same fear. Another is the common practice of weighing up the relative risks of a criminal record versus health concerns and dangerously consuming one's entire supply at once in preference to being caught with it, say at a music festival where sniffer dogs are being employed.

Basically the status quo is untenable, and intensifies and adds to any intrinsic harms associated with substance use and abuse. I would encourage you to look towards the case of Portugal for an example of a state that has fully decriminalised possession of personal use amounts of all substances, and the transformation that has taken place there. It is not perfect by any stretch, but there are lessons to be learned.

Before closing, I wanted to comment briefly on the case of the bad batch of pills (sold as MDMA) that killed a number of people and hospitalised some 20 in Melbourne in January of this year. It sounds as though they actually contained a cocktail of substances, including 4FA and 25C-NBOMe, which would not

show up on a conventional (basic) drug testing kit (possibly alongside just enough actual MDMA to elicit a positive result for MDMA). It later came out (via a leaked internal police memo), that police were aware of the bad batch of pills, were advised to be on the lookout for them, and yet withheld this information from the public.

(The following quote is taken from https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/leaked-police-memo-reveals-what-was-in-melbournes-deadly-batch-of-mdma)

When VICE asked Victoria Police why this information wasn't made public, a spokesperson said, "This internal memo was sent to police members on 27 January following several instances of highly concerning drug reactions, including a number of overdoses in Chapel Street last month... As the internal memo indicates, synthetic drugs can take a variety of forms. If we issue a warning for one particular lot, that does not mean the drug isn't also doing the rounds in other forms and so it is inappropriate to provide a specific warning."

I think the police response in this case was misguided, and that withholding potentially life saving information is inappropriate. It is common practice in many countries around the world to circulate detailed information about known dangerous batches of street drugs. You are doing the public a disservice by treating them as though a specific warning about a known bad batch will be interpreted as a ringing endorsement of everything else that is in circulation.

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File1:

File2:

File3: