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From: Inquiry into Drug Law Reform [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 7 March 2017 9:49 PM
To: LRRSC
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Mr William Summers
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Submission by William Summers (resident)

I am making this submission as a resident of Melbourne living within the Richmond (State Parliament boundaries) area. My interest in this topic is purely from a personal viewpoint, and with some level of frustration at the counterproductive drug policies currently in place in Victoria and Australia.

Drug reform is a very broad area, so I wish to focus my submission on three areas only:

1. Shifting drug policy from 'use reduction' towards 'harm reduction'
2. Support for a supervised injecting facility in Richmond
3. Legalising cannabis.

Shifting drug policy from 'use reduction' towards 'harm reduction'

1.1 The Government must shift its focus towards a pragmatic evidence-based approach that works. It has been clear for many years that current laws on drugs are not effective for reducing either drug use or drug harm. Drug users are dying, or becoming seriously harmed, because of a lack of honest information about the products they are consuming, and a lack of leadership in drug policy. When considering drug policy, the Government must place a much higher weight on the views of the Australian Drug Foundation and others who have a detailed scientific understanding of the subject.

1.2 The Government must shift its measures of drug policy success towards reducing aggregate harm, not simply aggregate use. That includes reallocating resources put into 'use reduction' activities, such as sniffer dogs at festivals (which are proven to be ineffective), into 'harm reduction' activities, such as pill testing kits for festival-goers to make sure their drugs are safe. To block drug testing facilities at known drug hotspots (such as nightclubs and festivals) is to take the view that it is better for one person to die or become seriously harmed than it is for 10 to take a drug with no ill effects. It is grossly irresponsible to let somebody die at a music festival in exchange for attempting to reduce other non-harmful drug use on the same site.

1.5 Drug addiction should be viewed as a personal and public health issue, not a criminal one. That means not prosecuting people in possession of a small quantity of drugs for personal use (who have no intent to distribute) and instead putting the resources into rehabilitation programs and credible public health campaigns.

Support for a supervised injecting facility in Richmond

2.1 I urge the State Government to support a pilot program for a supervised injecting facility for drug users, based in North Richmond, as a partial solution to the well known drug problem in the Victoria Street area.

2.2 Supervised injecting rooms have huge proven benefits for local services and the community. As Committee members will know, a similar facility in King's Cross, Sydney, has been an overwhelming success for many years. It is credited with dealing with over 6000 potentially fatal overdoses since 2001, and ambulance call-outs to the area are said to be

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down by 80%. There has been no increase in crime or any other significant social problems as a result of the facility. It is a proven evidence-based solution to a serious problem. Alternatively, drug users are dying in North Richmond, with huge knock-on effects for other services, because of political hesitancy.

2.3 I understand that some State MPs and Ministers are nervous about public reaction to the installation of an injecting room; however this should not override their responsibility to make courageous decisions for the State and its residents. Victorian residents are literally dying because of political inaction on this issue.

2.4 To all State MPs and Ministers I would simply say this: Political populism is extremely short-lived; turning around even one life that would otherwise be lost to drugs is a legacy that all politicians should aspire to. When you look back at the end of your political career, which side of the fence will you be able to say you were on?

Legalising cannabis

3.1 The State Government should begin a public consultation as soon as possible on the controlled legalisation of cannabis for recreational use, to explore the pros and cons and weigh up public support.

3.2 Legalising cannabis is hardly a radical suggestion anymore, particularly given that some states in the US have already legalised the drug. Therefore it seems a sensible and modest step towards modernising drug laws to ensure they are more realistic and practical.

3.3 Whilst there are valid health concerns about cannabis use, Government regulation of the drug would help alleviate these issues, for instance by regulating the strength and ingredients of products. Prohibition, on the other hand, leads to a thriving black market with highly contaminated products and irresponsible selling. As is the case with alcohol, the black market for cannabis would effectively disappear if it was instead Government regulated.

3.4 There is also the additional benefit of Government taxes arising from regulating the sale of any good – likely to be no small amount in this case.

William Summers
6 March 2017