



MEDIA RELEASE

Harm Reduction Australia Launched

Thursday 26 November 2015

Australia's first national harm reduction organisation for individuals committed to reducing the health, social and economic harms potentially associated with drug use - Harm Reduction Australia (HRA) – was launched today at Parliament House in Canberra

HRA was formed by a group of professionals concerned about drug policy in Australia.

Although for over thirty years Australia's National Drug Strategy has focused on harm minimisation, in recent years, the commitment and support for this evidence-based and effective approach to addressing drug use has waned across many of its government signatories.

HRA aims to develop Australia's first recognised network of individuals, including affected communities, committed to achieving and maintaining best practice harm reduction in Australia. It also seeks to educate the public, decision makers and the media about the efficacy and legitimacy of harm reduction and human rights-based policies and programs for redressing some of the potentially harmful consequences of drug use. As well as working to ensure reform to current drug policy with the primary aims of ending imprisonment, stigmatisation, discrimination and human rights violations against the people who use or have used drugs.

Annie Madden – Co-Founder of HRA stated *“Harm reduction saves lives. It is as simple as that. Without the early implementation and an ongoing support for harm reduction as a strategic policy response to HIV among people who inject drugs in the mid-late 1980s in Australia, we would be struggling now with the same sorts of devastating outcomes other countries are dealing with to this day. But we can never afford to be complacent. We have averted a major HIV epidemic among people who inject drugs in Australia but hepatitis C is a very different story. We have seen a 150% increase in the death rate from hepatitis C related causes in the past 10 years the majority of which is among people who inject or have injected drugs. We still have much to do when it comes to ensuring that everyone has access to new injecting equipment for every injecting occasion. Hepatitis C is entirely preventable and harm reduction is the answer. Harm reduction is effective and cost-effective – a win for all!”*

Tony Trimmingham – HRA Vice President & Co-Founder added – *“When my son Damien got involved with heroin at the age of 21, I admit that I knew very little about hard drugs. It is also true that I did not know much more when he died of an overdose a year later. His death motivated me to learn more and at first in my anger I wanted to go after the dealers who had been supplying him drugs. Fortunately I realised quickly that no matter how much energy I put into trying to pursue then that it was largely a waste of time and effort. I then switched to trying to find out about drugs and drug policy and the concept of harm reduction. I was shocked to find that people do not need to die. It is the illegality that causes the 3 main problems – death, disease and prison. It immediately made sense to me – especially when I realised that this “War on Drugs” that we had been pursuing for 30 years was getting nowhere. It is becoming clearer to me that if we are to ensure that tens of thousands of people do not lose their lives, risk death through overdose or suffer the life-long consequences of arrests then a wide movement for change is needed. I know that the majority of people and families faced with the choice of today’s harsh approach to drug use or one based on compassion and evidence will agree with me.*

Gino Vumbaca – HRA President & Co-Founder concluded – *“Those of us that work with people affected by drug use and in drug policy believe in the principles of harm reduction. Anyone who seriously reviews the evidence of this field of expertise would find it difficult to believe differently. I encourage everyone who wants to see Australia develop a more humane, effective and evidence informed response to drug use to join Harm Reduction Australia. Every membership will count and help achieve this change. It’s time for real change”*

<http://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/>

For further information please contact Mr Gino Vumbaca on 0408-244-552, Mr Tony Trimmingham on 0412-414-444 or Ms Annie Madden on 0414 628 136

The International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA) defines harm reduction as the ‘policies, programmes and practices that aim to reduce the harms associated with the use of psychoactive drugs in people unable or unwilling to stop. The defining features are the focus on the prevention of harm, rather than on the prevention of drug use itself, and the focus on people who continue to use drugs.’

HRA Board Members

Gino Vumbaca (President & Co-Founder)
Niki Parry (Secretary)
Garth Popple
James Ward
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Tony Trimmingham (Vice President & Co-founder)
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