



Thursday 21 April, 2016

## **Uniting calls for a re-think on drugs**

*Uniting, the services and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT, is calling for a re-think on illegal drug use.*

The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT, at its recent Synod meeting has given the go-ahead for its services and congregations to call for:

- Increased investment in harm reduction and demand reduction strategies, and
- Further measures to decriminalise individual possession of small amounts of illegal drugs (not to decriminalise the illegal supply of drugs).

A Uniting campaign will call on government leaders and policy makers to rethink their stance on illegal drugs – one based in compassion. Peter Worland, Executive Director of Uniting said, “There is a compelling case for us to take a new approach on drugs; a more compassionate response, a Christian response.”

Uniting will join with members of the legal and medical community to argue the case for decriminalisation, “People using illegal drugs in the community often resist help out of fear of being arrested. This fear prevents them from seeking help, and it ends up being either too little or too late. The consequences of drug use have touched almost every Australian family. We’re calling for some difficult conversations, but as a society, we can no longer ignore the evidence,” Mr Worland said.

The Medical Director of the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre, Dr Marianne Jauncey believes addressing the medical needs of people who use drugs is only half the challenge, “If our aim is to respect the inherent dignity of every person, we must re-frame the debate. I work with people every day who are trying to manage their dependence and get their lives back on track. Stigma and shame are big issues, and battling drug use convictions serves only to alienate people further. If we are a society which believes in giving people a fair go, if we believe in saving lives, we must do something differently.”

Uniting and Uniting Church congregations will join the growing community who have already put their name behind the medical and social evidence which proves a new approach is needed – including voices such as Sir Richard Branson, who recently visited the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre to learn more about its practices.

Rev Graham Long AM, CEO and Pastor at the Wayside Chapel said, “Experts the world over are beginning to agree that the “War on Drugs” is lost. We’ve witnessed an amazing investment of resources in a policy that generally makes life worse for everyone. I’m delighted that the Synod is open to considering evidence and looking for a new way forward. We’ll now have an army of voices championing the cause of the people we serve each day.”

## Notes

- The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT is the first major Christian denomination in Australia to endorse a policy position on the decriminalisation of the possession of use of small amounts of illicit drugs. Further information about the Synod's decision can be found here: [www.insights.uca.org.au/synod-2016-come-holy-spirit-renew-our-hearts/social-justice-forum-drug-law-reform-needed](http://www.insights.uca.org.au/synod-2016-come-holy-spirit-renew-our-hearts/social-justice-forum-drug-law-reform-needed)
- Uniting, the advocacy and services arm the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT will lead the public conversation on these issues on behalf of the Uniting Church NSW & ACT Synod, building on the evidence and experience in working with people who inject drugs at the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre.
- Over 15 years ago, the Uniting Church opened the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre. It was a first for Australia, and today it is still the only service of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. The centre has saved countless lives and has helped many onto the path of recovery and rehabilitation.
- Uniting joins with the following organisations calling for alternatives to drug prohibition: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW; Drug Policy Modelling Program, UNSW; **Harm Reduction Australia**; Discipline of Addiction Medicine, University of Sydney; Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW; The Australasian Professional Society for Alcohol and other Drugs; Headspace; Criminal Law Committee of the NSW Bar Association; Ted Noffs Foundation; Family and Friends of Drug Law Reform; Family Drug Support; NSW Users and AIDS Association.
- Uniting is not advocating for the decriminalisation of the supply of drugs.

## Media spokespeople

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- Rev Graham Long CEO & Pastor, The Wayside Chapel (Laura Watts, Head of Marketing and Fundraising, 0406 173 004 or Tim Stern, Government Relations, 0406 733 073)