



MEDIA RELEASE

National Survey on Drug Policy Results

2nd November 2017

In 2017 Harm Reduction Australia conducted a survey to gauge public opinion on what Australians who work and deal with drug issues want from their drug policies.

Over 1,000 people responded to the survey, with 80% of respondents coming from front-line service staff. The results included respondents from every State and Territory with 26% of responses from regional or rural areas and 2.2% from remote areas.

The survey largely confirmed what many of us whom have worked with drug and alcohol issues for many years have known – that the current policy settings are not informed by evidence and in many cases cause more harm rather than reduce harm.

It will also be heartening for the Victorian Government to know that the announcement of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre is supported by the overwhelming majority of people who work directly with drug users and related issues in the community. The announcement is applauded by Harm Reduction Australia as a victory for evidence and rationality. It is also a vindication of the hard work of many people, including HRA Advocates, Fiona Patten MP and David Stanley, and HRA Board Members Greg Denham and Meghan Fitzgerald, as well as numerous others associated with HRA, to help the people and Government of Victoria understand the community need and benefits to be gained from this new service.

The national survey also showed that there was overwhelming support for:

- Greater investment in harm reduction programs
- The introduction of pill testing at festivals
- The establishment of drug consumption rooms and supervised injecting facilities
- Needle and syringe programs being expanded to include prisons
- The widespread distribution and training in the use of naloxone (a drug that reverses the effects of heroin and other opioids)
- The establishment of an early warning system - where information on harmful drugs is quickly shared online and via social media, particularly in relation to overdoses due to high potency or other negative side effects.

There was also strong support for a range of policies including:

- The decriminalisation of many currently illicit drugs, particularly cannabis.
- The introduction of prescribed heroin programs
- Managed alcohol programs – these are services where a supervised maintenance dose of alcohol is provided to chronic homeless alcohol dependent people.
- The availability of e-cigarettes to reduce the harm from smoking
- Much greater participation of service providers and consumers in determining drug policies in Australia

Of particular note was the very strong opposition expressed for the drug testing people on welfare benefits with the majority of respondents recommending not using drug testing at all.

The results also highlight that there is a need for a far more open and honest discussion with the public on the evidence and outcomes surrounding current drug policies. Too often the public are misled by hyperbolic statements uncritically delivered via the media that simply generate fear rather than a focus on the evidence.

It is time for the Australian public to be told the truth about the harmful impact our drug policies are having on so many people.

We are hopeful that these survey results begin a process to ensure that the views of people with expertise, experience and knowledge in actually understanding the issues surrounding drug and alcohol use are invited to become far more involved and prominent in policy discussions and decisions by governments, rather than the current closed system that only involves politicians and their bureaucracies.

A full copy of the survey results can be found at:

For further information, please contact:

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Australia's first national harm reduction organisation for individuals committed to reducing the health, social and economic harms potentially associated with drug use