

# **NORTHERN TERRITORY HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY FOR ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOURS**

**Brief Submission from the National Drug  
Research Institute, Curtin University (NDRI)  
to the Select Committee**

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## Overview

The National Drug Research Institute's (NDRI) mission is to conduct and disseminate high quality research that supports evidence informed policy, strategies and practice to prevent and minimise alcohol and other drug-related health, social and economic harms among individuals, families and communities in Australia. Since its inception in 1986, the Institute has grown to employ about 30 research staff, making it one of the largest centres of drug research and public health expertise in Australia. It is a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Researchers have completed more than 500 research projects, resulting in a range of positive outcomes for policy, practice and the community. For example, NDRI research has significantly informed and contributed to policy and evidence-based practice such as the National Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS) Strategy, the National Drug Strategy and the National Alcohol Strategy; contributed to Australia's involvement in international strategies, such as WHO Global and Regional Strategy to Reduce Harmful Use of Alcohol; directly contributed to Australian and State government alcohol and illicit drug policy, including cannabis policy and naloxone availability; significantly contributed to international evidence-based school interventions; influenced NHMRC guidelines to reduce alcohol health risks; and been cited in development of policy documents for Aboriginal Australians.

NDRI has a long history of completing research, and working closely and in collaboration with organisations, in the Northern Territory, particularly through its Aboriginal Australian Research Team. These links date back into the 1990s, through such projects as an evaluation of the Territory's Living With Alcohol program, examinations of alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems in the Territory, and establishment and research support for the Tangentyere Council Research Hub. In the interests of brevity, this NDRI submission will outline some key references the Institute believes would be of value to the Select Committee.

## Selected key references

### Summary on naloxone programs in Australia

- Dwyer, R., Olsen, A., Fowle, C., Gough, C., van Beek, I., Jauncey, M., . . . Lenton, S. (2018). An overview of take home naloxone programs in Australia. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 37(4), 440-449.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dar.12812>

Take-home naloxone (THN) programs commenced in Australia in 2012 in the Australian Capital Territory and programs now operate in five Australian jurisdictions but not in the NT or Tasmania. The purpose of this paper is to record the progress of THN programs in Australia, to provide a resource for others wanting to start THN projects, and provide a tool for policy makers and others considering expansion of THN programs in this country and elsewhere.

### On discrimination and health of PWIDs

- Couto e Cruz, C., Salom, C. L., Dietze, P., Lenton, S., Burns, L., & Alati, R. (2018). Frequent experience of discrimination among people who inject drugs: Links with health and wellbeing. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. doi:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2018.06.009>

This study of 796 Australians who inject drugs highlighted that frequent discrimination may lead to worse health and wellbeing among PWID. It suggested that policies aimed at reducing discrimination against PWID may be warranted or improved.

### *On cannabis, social supply and regulation*

- Lenton, S., Grigg, J., Scott, J., Barratt, M., & Eleftheriadis, D. (2015). The social supply of cannabis among young people in Australia. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 503 (December), 1-6.

<https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi503>

This study recruited 200 Australian cannabis users aged 18-30 to explore the impact of supply routes on young users and their perceived notions of drug dealing to provide valuable insight into the influence that reciprocal relationships have on young people's access to cannabis.

- Lenton, S., Frank, V. A., Barratt, M. J., Dahl, H. V., & Potter, G. R. (2015). Attitudes of cannabis growers to regulation of cannabis cultivation under a non-prohibition cannabis model. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 26(3), 257-266.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.08.002>

This study used survey data on 1722 cannabis growers from Australia, Denmark and the UK. It (i) investigated support among current or recent cannabis growers, for various potential policy options for cannabis cultivation if prohibition were repealed, and (ii) explored the support for these options across countries, scale of growing operations, demographics, drug use and cannabis supply involvement variables.

- Potter, G. R., Barratt, M. J., Malm, A., Bouchard, M., Blok, T., Christensen, A.-S., . . . Wouters, M. (2015). Global patterns of domestic cannabis cultivation: Sample characteristics and patterns of growing across eleven countries. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 26(3), 226-237.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.12.007>

This 11 country sample of 6530 cannabis growers documents demographic characteristics; experiences with growing cannabis; methods and scale of growing operations; reasons for growing; use of cannabis and other drugs; participation in cannabis and other drug markets, and; contacts with the criminal justice system. A clear majority of those small-scale cannabis cultivators who responded to our survey are primarily motivated for reasons other than making money from cannabis supply and have minimal involvement in drug dealing or other criminal activities.

### *Putting alcohol consumption and harms into perspective*

- Lensvelt, E., Gilmore, W., Liang, W., Sherk, A. and Chikritzhs, T., N. (2018). *Estimated alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations in Australia, 2004 to 2015. National Alcohol Indicators Project, Bulletin No. 16.* National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth, WA.

<http://ndri.curtin.edu.au/publications-resources/project-reports-and-bulletins/national-alcohol-indicators-bulletins>

National Alcohol Indicators bulletin 16 documents numbers and trends for alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations across all Australian jurisdictions using the latest Burden of Disease Methods. The bulletin shows that an estimated 5,785 Australians aged 15+ years died of alcohol-attributable disease and injury in 2015, while hospitalisations attributable to alcohol exceeded 144,000 in 2012/13. Trends in alcohol-attributable deaths appeared to have remained stable or slightly decreased over time. National hospitalisation rates increased marginally between 2003/04 and 2012/13. Statistics and trends are also presented for each Australian state and territory.

### *Alcohol use in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context*

- Gray, D. Cartwright, K. Stearne, A. Siggers, S. Wilkes, E. Wilson, M. (2018). Review of the harmful use of alcohol among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin* 18(1), 42.

<http://ndri.curtin.edu.au/news-events/ndri-news/new-review-explores-the-harmful-effects-of-alcohol>

The review explores the harmful effects of alcohol use in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. It examines patterns of use, health impacts, underlying causal factors, policies and interventions to address these impacts, and ways to further reduce harm. The evidence presented suggests effective strategies to address the problem of harmful alcohol use include: alternative activities, brief interventions, treatment and ongoing care; taxation and price controls and other restrictions on availability; and community patrols and sobering up shelters.

### *Drug detection dogs at outdoor music festivals*

- Grigg, J., Barratt, M.J., & Lenton, S. (2018). Drug detection dogs at Australian outdoor music festivals: Deterrent, detection and iatrogenic effects. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 60, 89-95.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2018.08.002>

An anonymous online survey was completed by almost 2000 Australian festival-goers. Of those who expected dogs to be present at their last festival (n = 647), only 4% reported that this threat led them to decide not to take drugs. Instead, a variety of alternative responses to avoid detection were reported, many of which could place festival-goers at greater risk of experiencing drug-related harms.