

Students for sensible drug policy is an international grassroots network of students and young people. We educate and advocate for an evidence-based approach towards better drug policy for all. We acknowledge that young people aged between 20 and 30 are the largest group of people who use drugs in our society, while minority groups such as the LGBTQI community and indigenous Australians also carry a heightened propensity towards using drugs. These groups are seriously disaffected by the current drug policies of Western Australia and are largely left out of the drug policy debate. Why is it that the people who are affected most by such draconian laws are not consulted or considered when it comes to drug policy? This is why SSDP exists - to give a voice to those who have none, about a topic whereby speaking out may be incriminating.

SSDP believes in the abolishment of prohibition. Though, we recognise that there are several steps that need to be taken to reach this end goal. Humanity has tried prohibition before in America, with alcohol. Such policy gave rise to huge criminal enterprises, gangsters, speakeasies and illicit manufacture – outcomes which have been mirrored in the ongoing war on drugs that has raged for almost 50 years. Like with alcohol, these outcomes have increased the level of harm that consumers face. Whether it be dealing with criminals in order to source product, or simply not knowing exactly what product or how pure and concentrated that product is once obtained. As a toxicologist once told me, “drug dealers don’t provide product information on baggies”. Problems relating to these phenomena have been presenting themselves for many years in the form of; deaths at music festivals, increases in methamphetamine use which is a more harmful and concentrated form of amphetamine or speed, or overcrowding in prisons. Though, a pragmatic approach to amend these laws is rarely taken. Instead, our governments tighten their grip on current punitive measures and focus spending on a temporary fix by punishing those affected, rather than investing in effective support through demand and harm reduction strategies. One needs only to look to Portugal for evidence of how a decriminalised approach towards substance use can be more effective.

In addition, SSDP acknowledges the role that certain illicit substances may have to play in the treatment of mental health. Namely, the class of drugs known as “hallucinogens” or “psychedelics” have seen a resurgence in research in the last twenty years or so - and with good reason. DMT, LSD, Psilocybin or magic mushrooms and even the popular party drug MDMA or ecstasy have all been proving their worth in the treatment of PTSD, depression, anxiety and even addiction. These substances differ from current medications in that they are administered once or twice, with success rates usually over 50% and among people who have not responded to existing treatments. The effects are almost immediate and are maintained for 6-12 months. Traditional medications such as antidepressants can take up to 6 weeks or more to become effective, are administered daily, and may require the consumer to try a plethora of different brands before finding the right one that works for them. Despite showing promise elsewhere in the world, research into psychedelic substances in Australia is severely limited. Only one medical trial is planned in Victoria with Psilocybin. We feel prohibition and the stigma it creates for drugs and drug use has greatly contributed to the lack of home-grown science in this area.

To conclude, the war on drugs has been waged for longer than any other war in recent history with no end in sight. For as long as humans have existed, they have sought altered states of consciousness, regardless of what the laws dictate or the risk of harm. Instead of working against this natural phenomenon, we should be working to better understand it and work with its natural flow in the most economical, safe and humane way possible.