

RE: Inquiry into alternate approaches to reducing illicit drug use and its effects on the community

03 December 2018

Dear Committee members,

I write as a service provider to comment that all of our treatment services are considered alternative. Under clause 1 of your aims you are to be examining alternate approaches to reducing illicit drug use and its effects on the community.

Drug related problems for indigenous patients impact the all the lives of their community. The risks to their health of tobacco and alcohol impact the whole of their community. These risks are compounded by the addition of marijuana, amphetamines and gambling further damaging their community.

The addition of jail being part of the indigenous communities' life style represents a failure which none of us can be proud of. An estimated 35% of those in juvenile jail have well defined foetal alcohol syndrome. Up to 80% of juvenile prisoners are indigenous in Western Australia. We have one of the highest rates of foetal alcohol syndrome for any place in the world.

Added to the problems above is the growing problem of excess prescribing of opioids. The increased death rate which has doubled in WA in the last 15 years relates to increased deaths from opioids, alcohol and amphetamines. The increase in opioid deaths in the US and across Australia relates to medical prescribing for pain and for addiction. In the US doctors have responded to the increased opioid deaths by increasing the availability of sustained release naltrexone with a 450% increase in its use in the last 3 years.

In Western Australia I operate the Fresh Start Recovery Programme, delivering sustained release naltrexone to West Australians who wish to use it for ceasing opioids, alcohol and amphetamines.

REQUEST TO THE COMITTEE

The key change in Portugal is to recognise addiction as a medical disorder. The use of substances is a response to stress in nearly all the individuals we treat. Giving not for profits like Fresh Start 25-30% of the funding they require to carry out their work would not be consistent with Portugal's attitude.

Fresh Start needs full funding to detox and then maintain in treatment indigenous clients. Asking indigenous clients to pay for medical treatment which is essential to their recovery should not be happening. Fresh Start CEO and directors have asked for increased funding on the 29th of November with a meeting at the Mental Health Commission. We explained that without extra funding that Fresh Start would be forced to sell their Northam rehab that has operated since 1999.

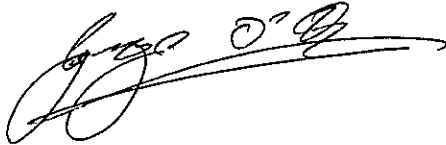
We at Fresh Start also work with doctors in the Kimberly who are asking for Fresh Start technology (implants and infusions). We have been keen to support the Kimberly gynaecologists in programs to deliver contraceptive implants and naltrexone implants to young women drinking alcohol so as to minimise the foetal alcohol events that damage our community so much. While foetal alcohol syndrome is a toxic effect of a legal drug it is associated with marijuana and cigarettes and a grossly damaged community by jail and community breakdown. It is the combined effects of these legal and illegal drugs that is adding to the devastation of indigenous communities.

While medical marijuana is being adopted in our State the risks for indigenous communities of increased access must be carefully considered.

Colorado legalized marijuana in 2014 and a federal study showed a sharp spike in traffic deaths since then. Additionally, marijuana use by young people in the state increased 20 percent since legalisation. It is the indigenous community most at risk of harm by police for prison admissions for the possession of marijuana and driving without a licence. Reform should start with running driving classes or training until all indigenous offenders have a licence. Full funding for treatment programs is an essential change that should occur for those that want to cease drug use.

Portugal has moved towards funding treatment rather than punishment. The WA government needs fully funded indigenous programs. Other citizens wishing support in ceasing drugs should also be fully supported.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'George O'Neil', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr George O'Neil

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