



The Salvation Army

Australia

The Salvation Army
Submission made on behalf of The Salvation Army Australia

Response to the

Select Committee Inquiry into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community

November 2018

For more information, please contact:

Major Brad Halse

National Head of Government Relations
The Salvation Army Australia
95-99 Railway Road,
Blackburn, VICTORIA, 3130

Phone: (03) 8878 2389

Email: brad.halse@aus.salvationarmy.org



The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to make this submission into the Legislative Council's *Inquiry into alternate approaches to reducing illicit drug use and its effects on the community*. This submission aims to provide a constructive contribution to the development of relevant policy and programs addressing illicit drug use and its effects on the community in Western Australia and the national more generally. The Salvation Army welcomes this inquiry and the opportunity for affected communities and organisations to have input into this important issue.

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in 128 countries worldwide. As one of the largest providers of social services and programs in Australia, we interact with people from all walks of life, including the most marginalised and excluded in society. We share our community's belief in a 'fair go' for all, which grounds our commitment to social justice and a particular interest in the health and wellbeing of people who are the most vulnerable members of our society.

The Salvation Army in Australia provides a diversity of services including aged care, family support, out of home care, accommodation and homeless services, disability services, emergency disaster responses, employment services as well as financial assistance and counselling. Managing more than \$60m worth of Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) services and programs across Australia, including over \$5m per annum in Western Australia, The Salvation Army has extensive experience with people who misuse or have become addicted to a range of substances and an in depth understanding of related issues. Services and programs include residential treatment, home based, community and residential withdrawal management (detox) facilities, counselling, aftercare, outreach services, sober-up facilities, needle syringe programs, AOD supported accommodation services and primary health services.

The Salvation Army consistently advocates for evidence-informed approaches to addressing substance misuse issues in Australia. We are passionate about easy and seamless access to treatment services for all who need them, particularly those who experience additional marginalisation through multiple co-occurring issues such as homelessness, mental health, physical health, family violence and a variety of poverty related problems. We strive to support individuals, families and communities to achieve a fulfilling life free of harmful substance misuse. We also believe that ready access to quality treatment should exist alongside other measures aimed at improving quality of life regardless of people's current substance use status. These include access to housing, employment, health and welfare services.

In developing future responses to illicit drug use and its effects on the community, The Salvation Army encourages governments to consider:

- The Salvation Army consistently advocates for evidence-informed approaches to addressing substance misuse issues in Australia. We are concerned that such evidence is often a casualty of politics and misinformation at the cost of better policy and program responses.
- The harm to individuals and communities of licit alcohol and tobacco far outweighs those for illicit drug use.
- While The Salvation Army is well-known for advocating abstinence as the best way for good health and a life fulfilled, it acknowledges that harm reduction initiatives are also

required as not all people will abstain. Given the enormous harms still evident among people who use illicit drugs and those impacting on the wider community, these initiatives should be extended where evidence is available.

- The Salvation Army maintains its support for the three pillars of the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 (and as represented in The Western Australian Alcohol and Drug Interagency Strategy 2017-2021) insofar as they truly contribute to the overarching objective of harm minimisation. However, we remain concerned at the funding balance between these pillars and the extent to which evidence has been used to inform their relative weighting.
- From its vast experience in working alongside people on the margins of society experiencing poverty and social isolation, The Salvation Army encourages governments to better understand and respond to the structural and economic determinants of health. People experiencing marginalisation have higher rates of poor health, homelessness, mental health issues and substance misuse.
- Consistent with the primacy of evidence-informed approaches, governments are asked to carefully consider the individual and community-wide impacts of criminalising lower level drug users. Through its courts and prisons chaplaincy services, The Salvation Army works with many people who would clearly benefit from enhanced access to health and social services rather than be exposed to the profoundly damaging consequences of the criminal justice system.

The Salvation Army again thanks the Select Committee into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community for the opportunity to provide input into future policy and programs in Western Australia.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with the Western Australian Government in the provision of quality treatment services and in the development of new policy and programs going forward. As such we would welcome the opportunity to discuss the contents of this submission should any further information be of assistance.