

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

PO Box 4736, HIGGINS ACT 2615

Telephone (02) 6254 2961

ffdlr.org.au

1 June, 2009

MEDIA RELEASE

New German law for heroin prescription challenges Australia to take its head out of the sand

Germany has now joined Switzerland, The Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom in making prescription heroin a standard treatment for those severely addicted to opiates who have failed other treatments.

“The German decision challenges Australia to remove John Howard’s veto of this medical treatment and put humanity and social well-being first,” said Brian McConnell, President of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform. “The veto of the decision of the Australian Health Ministers in 1997 for a heroin trial must be reviewed in the light of the rising number of overdose deaths and the threat of a renewed flood of Afghan heroin.”

The German parliament passed the law last Thursday evening following a careful trial and evaluation in 6 cities. Eligible persons for admission to the treatment will be those over 23 years of age and who have been addicted for more than five years and who have failed to respond to other treatments.

“Australia has now fallen far behind the Europeans,” said Brian McConnell, President of Families and Friends for Drug Law reform. “The result has been a huge cost to the community in terms of lives lost, health care costs and costs of crime.”

“There is now irrefutable European evidence,” said Mr McConnell, “that adding the option of heroin prescription cuts overdose deaths, improves the capacity of severely addicted users to take responsibility for their lives and reduces crime dramatically. A long term Swiss study has even shown that it is leading to a reduction in the recruitment of new drug users.”

“The Europeans are about providing health treatment to severely addicted people for whom all other treatments have failed,” said Mr McConnell. “These are people who have families and loved ones and if there is a treatment that would help restore and enable them to again become contributing members of society then surely Australian governments should give that treatment a go.”

“Excuses for not introducing it have become baseless given the overwhelming evidence that now exists in support of the measures. Attracting the severely addicted into treatment, away from recruiting and selling to new users to support their habit, will surely allay parents’ and governments’ concerns about the provision of this treatment.”

“It can undermine organised crime’s profit from heroin, which is critical at a time when world production of heroin is increasing.

“Much is to be gained with this common sense measure: there are lives to be saved, individuals’ health to improve and a huge potential for reduced crime and trafficking in illegal heroin.”

**For more information: Contact Brian McConnell
(02) 6254 2961 or mobile 04 0907 4033**