

## NEWSLETTER



September 2014

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### NEXT MEETING

Thursday September 25, 7.30pm  
St Ninian's Uniting Church hall,  
cnr Mouat and Brigalow Sts, LYNEHAM

**Come along and share the latest report from the Global Commission on Drugs, "Taking control: Pathways to policies that work", and share the latest on medical marijuana**

Meetings are followed by refreshments and conversation.

### Editorial

There is nothing like being laid up in hospital to provide a better perspective on life. One sees a wide variety of people being wheeled or walked into the wards.

Keith (not his real name) was the first I encountered. He was a big man who was homeless and had uncontrolled diabetes. Despite his loud and abrupt manner, staff bent over backwards to deal with his issues, and they did in fact sort out all his problems including his accommodation and caring needs when he was discharged. He was discharged a much happier man.

Paul was wheeled into the ward late at night and he appeared to be dissolving into the bed itself.

Pradesh, who made little squeaky mouse noises as he slept at night was at other times surrounded by his rather large and noisy family.

The nursing staff, doctors, in fact everyone including the food services and cleaning staff were very professional and caring. Nothing was too much trouble. It was a reflection of the excellent health system that we have here in Australia. And I for one would not object to raising the Medicare levy to ensure it remains so.

However the person who most touched my soul was a man who had succumbed to surgery for a very aggressive form of cancer. Some of his organs and surrounding tissue were removed. It was initially thought that all the cancer had been removed but he was advised a matter of weeks later that the cancer remained and was as aggressive as ever.

He was in hospital in an attempt to have his pain controlled. That was all that could be done for him. The cocktail of medication had only limited effect. It took some time to work, poorly controlled the pain and on one occasion had, for him frightening consequences. When not asleep from his cocktail

of opiate based drugs, his pain control was of such limited effect that he flinched at the slightest sharp noise - the trolleys with their noisy plastic wheels caused him to wince every time they were wheeled by.

His is a clear case for a trial of medical marijuana. If they witnessed his pain as I have done, our legislators would introduce that option immediately. However, I fear that option will be too late for this man, who is not afraid of dying, but does not want to die in pain.

### FFDLR'S

#### 19TH ANNUAL REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

**Monday 20th October, 2014**

12.30 pm at our Memorial at Weston Park

Speakers include:

Shane Rattenbury (MLA)

A parent who has lost a child

**Help Needed:** Let Marion know if you can bring sandwiches, slice, cake, fruit platter or other to help with refreshments. Bring flowers to lay at the memorial.

**Important: If you have a loved one you would like remembered by name at the ceremony please let Marion know by phoning 62542961 or email [mccconnell@ffdlr.org.au](mailto:mccconnell@ffdlr.org.au)**

### BOOK LAUNCH

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

by Dr John Jiggins

to be launched by Senator Lee Rhiannon,

Waratah Room, NSW Parliament

October 14, 6pm.

Don Mackay was murdered because he knew too much about the Mr Bigs who ran the Australian drug trade. His investigations posed a threat to some of Australia's most powerful businessmen. In the Man Who Knew Too Much, Dr John Jiggins reveals how the murder was conducted by a team of assassins, led by a detective working for the Nugan Hand Bank.

### Researchers back call by world leaders for end to criminalisation of drugs 10/09/2014

The Australian Drug Law Reform Initiative (ADLaRI) has welcomed (as has FFDLR) a new report by the Global

Commission on Drug Policy that calls for the decriminalisation of drug use and possession, alternatives to incarceration, and a greater emphasis on public health approaches to the problem of drug addiction.

In a report released in New York overnight, the Commission has called on the United Nations to consider seriously these alternatives to the War on Drugs.

Dozens of world leaders including the former presidents of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland have signed their names to the report, joining with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Virgin Group founder Richard Branson, former US Secretary of State George Shultz, and former Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Paul Volcker.

The recommendations would represent a major paradigm shift in global drug policy and will be presented at the UN Special Session on Drugs in 2016. The approach is outlined in Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work.

“Such a call by some of the world’s most prominent current and former leaders is unprecedented. Australian leaders in New South Wales and Canberra must now seriously consider the report’s recommendations,” said ADLaRI spokesperson Ben Mostyn.

“In particular, we call on the Australian Government to set up a Parliamentary Inquiry to consider Australia’s stance at the upcoming UNGASS 2016,” Mr Mostyn said.

ADLaRI is a project formed in the UNSW Faculty of Law to pursue pathways towards drug law reform, drug policy education, and the achievement of social justice.

The Parliamentary Inquiry must investigate whether:

- Penalties of imprisonment should be abolished for minor drug offences;
- All drugs should be decriminalised by the Commonwealth;
- Marijuana should be decriminalised by the Commonwealth to bring it in line with three States and Territories;
- Prison causes more harm to individuals than use of the drug itself;
- More money needs to be directed towards a public health approach instead of a punitive approach to drug addiction; and
- Doctors should be able to prescribe medical marijuana to patients.

## **Tony Abbott backs legalisation of medical cannabis**

Matthew Knott, The Canberra Times, September 17, 2014

**P**rime Minister Tony Abbott has thrown his support behind the legalisation of cannabis for medical purposes.

In a letter to talkback radio host Alan Jones, Mr Abbott went even further than NSW Premier Mike Baird – who has approved a clinical trial of the use of medical cannabis – by saying that no further testing should be needed on the drug if it is legal in similar jurisdictions.

“I have no problem with the medical use of cannabis, just as I have no problem with the medical use of opiates,” Mr Abbott wrote in a letter to Jones dated August 23.

“I was under the impression that the personal use of cannabis was no longer an offence in NSW.

“If a drug is needed for a valid medicinal purpose though and is being administered safely there should be no question of its legality. And if a drug that is proven to be safe abroad is needed here it should be available.

“I agree that the regulation of medicines is a thicket of complexity, bureaucracy and corporate and institutional self interest.

“My basic contention is that something that has been found to be safe in a reliable jurisdiction shouldn’t need to be tested again here.”

Jones read out the letter from Mr Abbott – who has not commented publicly on the issue before – on his 2GB breakfast program on Wednesday. The influential presenter has been campaigning on behalf of 24-year-old Dan Haslam, who has been using cannabis to relieve nausea associated with chemotherapy to treat his terminal cancer.

Mr Abbott’s intervention was welcomed by Mr Haslam’s mother, Lucy, who has launched a popular online petition to decriminalise cannabis for pain relief.

*I have no problem with the medical use of cannabis, just as I have no problem with the medical use of opiates,” Mr Abbott wrote in a letter..*

Mr Baird announced on Tuesday that a clinical trial into medical cannabis will report back to the government by the end of the year.

He also told the NSW Parliament that he would formalise new guidelines to clarify the NSW police discretion to not charge terminally ill adults if they are caught using cannabis for pain relief.

In Victoria, state Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews has promised to legalise access to medical marijuana for Victorians with life-threatening conditions if Labor wins office in November.

He made an election promise last month to seek advice from the Victorian Law Reform Commission on how people “in exceptional circumstances” could get the drug.

The commission would be asked to report back on how the prescription, manufacture and distribution of medical cannabis could be regulated by August next year.

While the plan opens up the possibility of approved people growing their own cannabis or being protected from criminal charges for possessing it, Victorian Health Minister David Davis said he would only allow more clinical trials of cannabis-based pharmaceuticals.

This is how Sativex – a cannabis-derived mouth spray approved for people with multiple sclerosis – became available in Australia.

Alex Wodak, the former director of the Alcohol and Drug Service at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, welcomed Mr Abbott's statement.

"The community response to medical cannabis is very supportive," he said.

Dr Wodak said about 20 countries – as well as more than 20 states in the United States – had legalised medical cannabis.

Colorado and Washington have also legalised the sale of cannabis for recreational use.

Greens senator Richard Di Natale said members of the cross-party Parliamentary Group for Drug Policy and Law Reform would introduce legislation this month so that medical cannabis is no longer scheduled as an illegal drug.

Dr Di Natale said the Therapeutic Goods Administration should create a special category for medicinal cannabis and that it should be available under prescription from a doctor.

Queensland Liberal National Party MP Warren Entsch is also campaigning to legalise medical cannabis.

A spokeswoman for Mr Abbott confirmed the letter reflected Mr Abbott's views on the issue.

## Public Forum: Better Understanding Evidence-Based Medicinal Cannabis Option for the ACT

Presented by ATODA, the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and the AIDS Action Council

There is widespread interest in medicinal cannabis in Australia, with the ACT Legislative Assembly considering legislation and conducting an Inquiry. Currently some Australians self-medicate with cannabis for various conditions, with some doing so with the support of their physician. By doing this they are behaving illegally because all forms of cannabis are currently prohibited in the ACT and Australia.

There is widespread public support for changing legislation to permit the use of cannabis for medical purposes (69%) and for a clinical trial (74%).

At the forum, world-class Australian thinkers will discuss the evidence base for medicinal cannabis including for which conditions it is indicated; its history and socio-political contexts; and the various supply options. The forum will include short presentations, a panel Q&A and information about current developments in the ACT.

Speakers and panel members include:

- Mrs Agnes Shea OAM, Ngunnawal Elder
- Emeritus Professor Laurence Mather, University of Sydney
- Dr Alex Wodak, St Vincent's Hospital & the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation
- Mr David McDonald, Australian National University
- Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA - who has introduced a Private Members Bill on medicinal cannabis into the ACT Legislative Assembly
- Mr Michael Moore, Public Health Association Australia
- Dr Chris Bourke MLA, Chair of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services, will also describe the terms of reference and how the public can participate in the Inquiry into the exposure draft of the

Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014 and related discussion paper.

- Ms Carrie Fowlie, ATODA

Date: 23 September 2014

Time: 5:30 – 7pm (arrival and refreshments from 5pm)

Venue: Reception Room, ACT Legislative Assembly

Cost: Free

RSVP: Please, to [info@atoda.org.au](mailto:info@atoda.org.au)

## 7th Annual ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Sector Conference

What's the drug policy 'problem'? Our understanding of the 'problem' comes from different perspectives. This conference will explore why understanding different perspectives matters and how these perspectives both shape the 'problem' and the potential solutions. Different perspectives can also have different weight and often consumer perspectives are sidelined. We will unpack and challenge four different drug policy 'problems' and seek to put ourselves in other people's shoes. Topics include:

- Medical cannabis
- E-cigarettes
- Drug driving
- New psychoactive substances

The conference will bring together all parts of our sector including researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, consumers and families.

World-class thinkers will be provoking ideas and discussion, including:

- Professor Alison Ritter, Drug Policy Modelling Program, NDARC, UNSW
- Dr Helen Keane, Australian National University
- Ms Anke van der Sterren, Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT
- Dr Coral Gartner, University of Queensland
- Dr Monica Barratt, Drug Policy Modelling Program, NDARC, UNSW
- Mr Ross Bell, New Zealand Drug Foundation
- Mr David McDonald, Australian National University
- Professor Max Cameron, Monash University
- Emeritus Professor Laurence Mather, University of Sydney
- Dr Alex Wodak, St Vincent's Hospital & Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation

### Conference approach

The conference will challenge speakers and participants to apply Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the problem represented to be' questions, including:

- What is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?
- What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
- How has the representation of the 'problem' come about?
- What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
- What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
- How/where is this representation of the 'problem' produced, disseminated and defended?
- How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Each session will include 'a consumer perspective' which will be developed in advance in consultation with consumers. This will provide a perspective on the given drug policy 'problem'.

Date: Wednesday 24 September 2014

Time: 9am – 5pm

Venue: National Portrait Gallery of Australia (King Edward Terrace, Parkes)

Fees: ATODA members: \$88.00, Non-ATODA members: \$118.00, Consumers and families: Free (limited places – 10% of the registrations are fully subsidised, contact ATODA to access)

Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/7th-annual-act-alcohol-tobacco-and-other-drug-sector-conference-tickets-12316104801>

For more information: Visit the ATODA website, email [conference@atoda.org.au](mailto:conference@atoda.org.au), or call (02) 6255 4070

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Conference Program is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the 'Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvement Grants Funds' and is managed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

## **Stalemate over needle exchange hampering prison officers' pay talks**

Tom McIlroy, Canberra Times, September 17, 2014

**B**ack pay and a new agreement for prison officers were being delayed by the debate over a needle and syringe exchange program inside the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher has called on the Community and Public Sector Union to progress enterprise bargaining negotiations for prison officers, before resolving a long-standing dispute on a needle exchange program inside Canberra's jail.

She said back pay and a new agreement for officers were being delayed by the debate over a needle and syringe exchange program inside the Alexander Maconochie Centre, first proposed more than two years ago.

Ms Gallagher questioned the timing of the renewed debate this week, as government bureaucrats continued negotiations with union officials on the matter.

Corrective Services Minister Shane Rattenbury said the decision should rest with the independent industrial relations umpire and welcomed a meeting with Community and Public Sector Union officials.

On Wednesday, the union's deputy national president, Alistair Waters, used a Canberra Times opinion piece to call on the ACT government to "confront some home truths" on the proposed needle exchange scheme.

Mr Waters said the program could increase the spread of blood-borne viruses and facilitate the sharing of needles inside the prison and remand centre, where needles are used as currency and traded in the "informal economy".

"We've been working this through for years with the CPSU," Ms Gallagher said.

"They are fundamentally opposed to it. We're trying to work out if there's any way to reach agreement on it and, at the moment, it seems to be blocking up prison officers getting their back pay and getting their EBA sorted."

Higher-than-average rates of hepatitis C within the jail meant the exchange was needed, Ms Gallagher said, and a trial inside the correctional setting was justified.

"We'd like to do it with the agreement of staff and with the suitable protections that staff have raised ... we've got a model that does all that," she said.

"It is more a process of continuing to work through this, rather than forcing anybody's particular position, and that's the approach we've taken over the past four years and I'm not going to change it now."

Mr Rattenbury acknowledged concerns among prison officers and staff, but said public-health benefits meant the government remained committed to introducing the program.

He said the government would work with any ruling made during industrial arbitration but he remained optimistic a resolution could be found.

The continuing "log jam" of the issue was unacceptable and a resolution was needed.

"The government has advice that the current clause in the enterprise agreement around the needle and syringe program is impermissible so, on that basis, we've put a range of proposals forward as part of the negotiations to move past that and focus on practicalities of finding a model that works inside the jail that both delivers the public-health outcomes and is safe for the staff," Mr Rattenbury said.

On Wednesday, union ACT secretary Vince McDevitt called for the government to change the laws governing needles inside the prison.

He predicted it would be "flooded" by drug equipment under the government's plan.

## **Interview with David Caldicott, an emergency medicine specialist at the Calvary Hospital in Canberra**

**D**avid is particularly interested in the treatment of recreational drug users, and not afraid to speak his mind when it comes to drugs policy.

He's a strong advocate for harm minimisation - he believes more education and less prohibition is the way to go.

David didn't choose this area of medicine; he got "shoved into it" when he was based in South Australia for ten years. He found the conservative approach to illicit drugs policy there not only aggravating, but "dangerous".

He felt he had to speak out publicly - something that won him enemies as well as friends.

David wants the conversation about drugs in Australia to be louder, and more honest.

Listen to David on ABC local radio at this address:

[http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/brisbane/conversations/201409/r1330279\\_18495146.mp3](http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/brisbane/conversations/201409/r1330279_18495146.mp3)