



# Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

*committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use*

## August Newsletter 2016

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Hi Everyone,

- **Monthly meeting at 7:30 pm at St Ninian's Uniting Church in Lynham on the 25th of August. Do drop in if you have time**
- **ACT Election Forum (see below)**
  - **Date: Monday 29 August 2016**
  - **Time: 5.00pm - 6:30pm**
  - **Where: The Bradman Theatre, National Convention Centre**
  - **(31 Constitution Avenue, Canberra)**
- **Overdose Awareness Day. 31st August (see below)**
- **The FFDLR Remembrance Ceremony in Canberra will take place place this year on Monday the 24th of October. Confirmed speakers are Sione Crawford and Gai Brodtmann MP.**

### ACT Election

The legislative Assembly elections will be held on Saturday the 15th of October. Twenty five candidates are to be elected. ACTCOSS has invited the three party leaders to a discussion forum next week. We hope that we will have time to ask leaders about opportunities for drug law reform.

Details from the ACTCOSS newsletter are below:

### ACT Election Forum - 29th Aug

#### ACT 2016 Election Community Forum with Party Leaders

You are invited to attend a community sector leaders forum with:

- **Andrew Barr** MLA (Labor);
- **Jeremy Hanson** MLA (Canberra Liberals);
- **Shane Rattenbury** MLA (ACT Greens)
- and moderated by **Tim Shaw**, host of 2CC breakfast talk radio show "Talking Canberra"

Leaders will respond to priorities identified in a Community Shared Statement for the 2016 Election being released soon.

Date: Monday 29th August 2016

Time: 5.00pm - 6:30pm

Where: The Bradman Theatre, National Convention Centre  
(31 Constitution Avenue, Canberra).

FREE event and no RSVP necessary.<sup>1</sup>

<http://www.actcoss.org.au/news-events/events/party-leaders-forum-act-election>

## Overdose awareness day

The Penington Institute is promoting a world -wide overdose awareness day on the 31st of August. Here is a short extract from their website:

*On Wednesday 31 August 2016 people around the world will pause to remember the more than 100,000 people who die each year of an overdose.*

*International Overdose Awareness Day is a global day of commemoration and celebration.*

*CEO of Penington Institute John Ryan said that in the 16th year of the event overdose remained a rapidly growing concern.*

*“In the US, politicians and policy-makers including the President have acknowledged they are in the midst of an overdose epidemic with more than 120 overdose deaths per day.*

*“Globally, overdose is a major problem with at least 100,000 overdose deaths per year according to the UN’s World Drug Report 2016,” Mr Ryan said.*

*“And the number of deaths is likely to be far higher than 100,000. The stigma associated with overdose means that many overdose deaths are not counted as overdoses, plus many countries under-report their overdose statistics.”*

*“Overdose deaths continue to climb and action needs to be taken on a number of fronts. It’s time to act,” he said.*

*“Our theme of ‘Time to act’ can have various meanings. Yes, it’s time for decision makers globally to take action to help stop the escalating rates of overdose around the world. But also, ‘Time to act’ refers to the actions that individuals can take to save a life from overdose,” Mr Ryan said.*

<http://www.penington.org.au/time-to-remember/>

On this day silver may be worn as a commemoration.

In Canberra CAHMA is able to provide assistance with naxolone training and is also hosting a commemorative wall memorial. See last month's newsletter.

## Canberra Times article

Jack Waterford at the Canberra Times wrote an outstanding article on the ineffectiveness of current drug policy in relation to ICE – although his commentary would apply to all drugs. Here is the link for those wishing to read the piece:

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/extra-money-spent-on-drug-law-enforcement-is-having-little-effect-on-ice-trade-20160804-gqktt4.html>

I wrote the following letter to the Canberra Times supporting the article although unfortunately it was not published.

*Thanks to Jack Waterford for his article “Drug blitz cuts no ice” (August 6, Forum 1) He showed that despite the best efforts of the AFP the availability and cost of crystal methamphetamine does not change. So what is the solution to the harms caused by this and other banned substances? To get to the heart of the problem, let us consider the proposition that “the person who uses a mind altering substance is a criminal.” Is such a proposition tenable? Most people these days would consider making alcohol consumption into a criminal offence somewhat crazy. This is in spite of the well-documented harm alcohol causes. Given this precedence it is hypocritical in the extreme to make criminals out of users of any other mind altering chemicals. Such people may be foolhardy, because unlike alcohol users they do not know the dose consumed, or have any guarantee of contents, but have they really committed “an action which constitutes a serious offence against an individual or the state?” (Definition of “crime” Concise Oxford Dictionary) Clearly they have not, and as such are not criminals!*

*Effective decriminalisation of all drug use has to occur quickly. Firstly decriminalisation and reform would make the world into a safer place for illicit drug users. Consider that such people are likely to be our children. My younger son died from a heroin overdose. Secondly crime rates have been shown to fall and the police are freed up for more effective actions. Thirdly it is easier for us to assist drug users to turn their lives around when they are not*

*branded as criminals. Going to jail is often the start of a long road downhill. A criminal record also adversely affects even the most basic of requirements – finding accommodation and a job.*

*One of the recommendations made by the cross-party Parliamentary Drug Summit held in April this year was “Australia should implement and evaluate the health benefits of removing criminal sanctions for personal drug use as demonstrated in international settings”. Let us hope that our new government puts this into place.*

## **NSW cross-party harm minimisation round table**

Last week on the 15th of August a cross-party discussion was held in Sydney to examine the effectiveness of NSW laws. This was set against the background of possible reduced funding for the King's Cross medically supervised injecting room (MISC). Many of the people who presented at the conference are well known to FFDLR in the field of drug law reform including Tony Trimmingham, Alex Wodak, David Caldecott and Dr Marianne Jauncy from MISC. Current and former politicians including Bob Carr spoke as well as the Honorable Michael Kirby and Professor Nicholas Cowdrey. There is a Facebook link and a valuable ABC report at the following websites:

<https://www.facebook.com/nswcphmr/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2016/s4515929.htm>

An extensive NSW parliamentary briefing paper was prepared ahead of the conference. It is available here:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Documents/Illegal%20drug%20use%20and%20possession%20current%20policy%20and%20debates.pdf>

Dierk von Behrens attend on behalf of FFDLR. Reading through Dierk's comments and looking at the conference report on the Web it is clear that the time for talking is well past. The evidence is clear – many of our children are dying as result of Australia's archaic laws. It is now a time to have reform – as it has been for 20 years.

Unfortunately I couldn't see any firm

recommendations that came from the conference – unlike the summit held in Canberra earlier in the year. The main outcome appears to be a letter to the leaders of the NSW government and the opposition to further discuss drug law reform. Given the time and expertise devoted to the conference one might have hoped for a much stronger result.

## **Better drug policy productive of a better world**

Bill Bush has penned a very comprehensive analysis entitled “Better drug policy productive of a better world”. Bill examines in detail the flow-on effect of the harm that our drug laws cause in society at large. He examines such factors as Delinquency and imprisonment, suicide, family breakdown, and poverty, welfare dependency and unemployment. He then goes on to document the experiences of countries that have abandoned treating the drug user as a criminal.

The conclusion in part is as follows:

*Existing drug policy was formulated with the best of intentions. Prohibited drugs like heroin are dangerous unless used under medical supervision: they leave dependent users susceptible to overdose and death. Restrictions on the availability of such drugs may offend libertarian principles in the case of a decision by a mature adult fully informed of the risks involved. But given the potential attraction of addictive drugs to minors, there is an argument for the State to be guided by conservative paternalistic principles to reduce the availability of such substances. That being the case, what measures most effectively reduce the availability of those substances? The answer is certainly not criminal prohibition, because prohibition stimulates the availability of those addictive substances. Criminal prohibition does this by inflating the price that addictive substances can command from a captured market of dependent users. Opiate users in Australia are now dying from overdose at the rate of over 300 per year which is back to the level that existed at the end of the 1980s (IDRS 2014 table 76 p. 99 & ABS 2016 cause X4 in ABS 3303.0 Causes of Death, Australia, 2014; Table 1.2 Underlying cause of death, All causes, Australia, 2005–2014).*

If anyone would like a copy of this document please

contact me and I can forward until we have published on the website. It complements the Drug Law Wars book in terms of explaining to others the importance and benefits of reform.

## Uniting Advocacy

Uniting – the services and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church - is running a campaign to influence other organisations to join in the push for decriminalisation. Here is the text from part of their campaign rationale:

### Decriminalisation of individual possession

*Why is the issue important?*

- *Many people using illicit drugs want to get their lives back on track, but are being held back by their criminal convictions.*
- *Much police time and resources is being wasted on pursuing minor convictions, which does not reduce the supply of drugs.*
- *The criminalisation of the use and possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use does not deter people from using drugs.*

*Uniting believes that decriminalising the possession of small amounts of illegal drugs would break down the barriers that stop people from getting the support they need to get their lives back on track.*

#### ***What does the evidence tell us?***

*The evidence shows that the most harmful part of drug taking is not necessarily the effect of drug use, but rather the criminality of the act and the impact it can have on employment, education, and futures.*

*Of the nearly 80,000 Australians charged with illicit drug related offences in 2014/15, 66% of them were charged only with personal possession or use (ABS, 2016).*

FFDLR have pledged support to Stafford Sanders of Uniting who is spearheading the campaign.

A more comprehensive press release is available here:

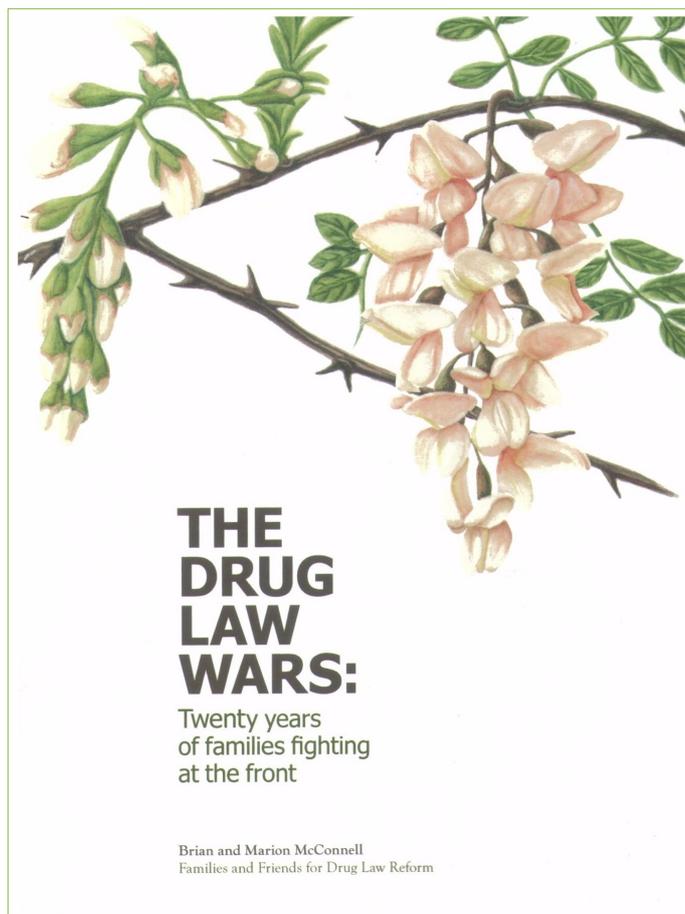
<https://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Uniting-Media-Release-21-April-2016.pdf>

## Drug Law Wars on the Radio

CAHMA presents a radio show on 2XXfm every week. Here is a link to find out more information about the show.

<http://www.2xxfm.org.au/program/news-from-the-drug-warfront>

# ORDER FORM FOR BOOK



This volume, written to commemorate twenty years of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, tells of a momentous journey which began with a group of grieving parents who weren't prepared to accept a system that was not protecting their kids from drugs. They set out to change an injustice. This is a story of perseverance through times of hope and times of despair. It is a must read by anyone trying to right a wrong, by families who suffer because of our drug laws, by politicians who have the capacity to make the system better, by AOD service providers, by law enforcers, educators, researchers and by our society as a whole that we may better understand the crucial need for changes to be made to our drug laws.

## TO PURCHASE A BOOK

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