

**Potential to save lives at dance festival stopped**

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform are dismayed at the shelving of the pill testing trial at the forthcoming Spilt Milk Festival.

The demand of the organiser through the National Capital Authority "to provide documentation, insurance, legal framework to operate on federal land.” Documentation is of course perfectly reasonable but the gloating of Vicki Dunne, the ACTU shadow health minister reported on ABC triple J indicates that raw politics is at play: Health Minister Fitzharris "can feel free to blame the Commonwealth whilst being silently thankful that she did not have to deliver on pill testing."

Will Ms Dunne relish a string of emergency hospital admissions and even deaths of young Canberrans on the grounds that such misfortunes send the right message?

This is just the latest in a string of setbacks experienced by Families and Friends in its 23 years of existence at the hands of an ostensible Liberal Party

It was not always thus. Once upon a time Australian harm minimisation drug policy embodying harm reduction was bipartisan. The trail blazing policy was the admiration of the world in which we took pride.

Harm minimisation places at the fore individual health and life and community well-being above a simplistic authoritarian mindset that believes, against all understanding, of how young human beings tick, that the drug problem is solved merely by ordering our kids to say no.

Rather than suppressing the drug trade, criminalising drug use has been a gift to organised crime (worth $7.6 billion in 2010) which, in the words of another victim of the drug war, the National Crime Authority, constituted “a major threat to society.”

Liberal governments opposed the cannabis expiation notice scheme, canned the heroin trial championed by an ACT Liberal Chief Minister, reversed Western Australian cannabis law reforms, opposed the medically supervised injecting room in Sydney, and consigned to the rubbish bin the Pennington enquiry in Victoria.

There is a pattern of behaviour emerging here. There’s an abdication of the conviction that the role of government should not be to undermine but to fortify the capacity of citizens to take responsibility for their health and well-being.

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