

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug policy

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MEDIA RELEASE

Remove an obstruction to life saving health care

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform are preparing for the 25th Remembrance Ceremony for those who lose their lives through failed illicit drug policy. Twenty-five years of advocacy and still people are being added to the list of those to be remembered.

The speakers' words at this year's ceremony will bring to us a sense of the tension between the known principles of person centred care and punitive law enforcement especially as it relates to drugs and mental health.

"This tension is lethal," declared Bill Bush, President of FFDLR. Friends of a young student, Matthew, will tell of his struggle with anxiety and insomnia and how mental health turned him away because he was "a druggie". He died earlier this year of multiple toxicity.

[The NSW coroner](#) documented how the mental health system failed a young aboriginal man, Jonathan Hogan, who was in trouble with ice. He walked out of the Adult Mental Health Unit to which an ACT magistrate had referred him, crossed the border and ended up in Junee prison where in despair he took his own life.

Jennie will speak of the tragic loss of her daughter following a music festival where pills were consumed with no harm reduction safe use messages for the young festival goers.

More and more names are being added to the list. "We call on government to rectify the systemic failures that produce these tragedies," insisted Mr Bush.

The long list of names will be read by Rev Simon Hansford, Moderator of the NSW/ACT Synod of the Uniting Church which through its [Fair Treatment campaign](#) is advocating decriminalisation of personal use of drugs and greater efforts to reduce demand and harm.

At present, clinicians and the poorly supported Alcohol and Drug Sector are expected to reconcile the tension created by the law and perpetuated by government policy.

Mr Bush went on to observe that prisons have become today's mental health institutions, even though it has long been recognised that they are the most damaging place for people with mental health conditions to be.

The [Productivity Commission](#) has identified "stigma and marginalisation" as "key factors driving poor outcomes in Australia's mental health system."

"We are convinced that drug policy is a principal driver of that," added Mr Bush.

We have seen how the ACT saves lives through permitting pill testing – lives lost across the border in NSW - and how, by lifting criminal sanctions on cannabis use and possession, has encouraged young people who want help to seek it. We are grateful for the ambitious program of reform that the incoming Labor/Greens government has set itself. "But," added Mr Bush, "we will not be satisfied until there ceases to be new names added to the list of those we are remembering each year."

WHERE: Memorial, east side of Weston Park Road (Opp Pescott Lane), Weston Park, Yarralumla

WHEN: Monday, 26 October at 12.30-1.30pm

INTERVIEWS: Bill Bush; Marion McConnell; Jennie Ross-King; Julian Juhas; Oscar Wilson & Simon Hansford

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