



Harm Reduction Innovation Fund

Reducing Harm, Saving Lives.

Ethical. Innovative. Necessary.

The Greens will restore Australia's reputation as a leader on innovative drug policy through the establishment of a Harm Reduction Innovation Fund. By investing in harm reduction, we create better health outcomes for drug users and for our communities as a whole.

The current approach to reducing the harm that illicit drugs cause in our community is not working. And right now, many of the things we are doing to address this issue are making it worse rather than better.

The Greens recognise that when we treat personal drug use as a criminal issue, we use vital resources to punish the individual rather than focussing on illicit drug manufacturers and distributors who are the real criminals. We are also distracted from the opportunities to reduce drug users' exposure to harm, and often avoidable deaths.

> REDUCING HARM

Our police and politicians acknowledge that we cannot "arrest our way" out of this issue, so The Greens are proposing a new approach, with harm reduction innovation at its core.

The Greens will:

- **Establish a Harm Reduction Innovation Fund** and commit \$10million per annum over the forward estimates to foster the implementation of innovative harm reduction strategies in Australia.
- **Prioritise investment in harm reduction measures** that assist in building an evidence base for wider implementation of effective strategies.
- **Explore and review** global harm reduction initiatives to keep up with international best practice, and restore our reputation as a leader in innovation in drug policy.
- **Ensure initiatives** are evaluated and have safety controls and ethical approvals.

> INNOVATIVE HARM REDUCTION

"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got," wrote Chief Executive of the Australian Drug Foundation days before the Australian

Parliamentary Drug Summit in Canberra earlier this year.¹ For too long, the politics has left harm reduction approaches under resourced and under researched. The Harm Reduction Innovation Fund will provide the resources to expertly examine harm reduction approaches to provide a strong evidentiary base for the best policy and practice decisions.

> PILL TESTING

Too often in Australia, we hear tragic reports of hospitalisations and deaths of young people as a result of drug overdoses at festivals. What goes unheard is that simple harm reduction measures exist that could curb the number of young people finding themselves in harms way.

Pill testing can provide information to drug users on the content of illegal drugs to allow them to make more informed choices. Research shows young people are highly supportive of pill testing; more than 82% of the 2,300 young Australians aged between 16 and 25 years surveyed for the Australian National Council on Drugs in 2013 supported its introduction. The finding is consistent with young people's overall views about drugs: they want better information in order to make informed choices.²

Despite the public support, and successful international trials of pill testing, there have been no government commitment in Australia to introduce or trial it.³ Australian politicians need to remove barriers to sensible, targeted micro-policy trials such as drug testing at music festivals. The Harm Reduction Innovation Fund will help to achieve this.

¹ <http://www.adf.org.au/media-centre/latest-news/blog>

² Ritter, A. Six reasons Australia should pilot 'pill testing' party drugs. The Conversation. ; 2014, 12 November <http://theconversation.com/six-reasons-australia-should-pilot-pill-testing-party-drugs-34073>

³ As above.

> EXPANDED SAFE INJECTING FACILITIES

When the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) was established, the sky did not fall in. Instead, lives have been saved, injuries minimised, and vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of people provided with a path into health care and social services.

Clinically Supervised Injecting Facilities (CSIFs) allow for vital education and emergency care, as well as offering pathways into rehabilitation, treatment and other health services for people who inject drugs. Evidence from both Australia and overseas indicates that CSIFs are an effective way of reducing some of the harms associated with injecting drug use.

The Harm Reduction Innovation Fund would fund the establishment of further CSIFs within areas identified as experiencing above average drug-related problems.

> PEER BASED INITIATIVES

Peer based drug user organisations provide an important voice for people who use illicit drugs. The Harm Reduction Innovation Fund would prioritise funding grants to National and State peer-based user organisations to develop **national accreditation and training standards for harm reduction services** as well as resources promoting harm reduction and better access to health care.

Training would support delivery of a range of services aimed at increasing access to health care, reducing transmission of blood borne viruses and reducing the harms of drug use.

Administering the funds through a central organisation would allow collaboration and would promote the expansion of peer-delivered models of service such as Dance Wise in Victoria, Peer Link in NSW and Peer Delivered naloxone in ACT and WA.

Key services could include:

- Peer led, clinically supervised safe injecting facilities
- Peer support for access to hepatitis C treatment including service delivery via Needle and Syringe Programs (NSP)
- Accredited peer workforce in NSP services and peer delivered NSP outreach and education services
- Harm reduction services for music events including safe spaces, improved information for young people via web-based resources including moderated forums and pill testing
- Consumer engagement, and stigma and discrimination training.

The services listed above would require development of new models for police, clinical services, community and peer-based organisations to work together.

> A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Political leadership is required to ensure law enforcement and health sectors facilitate the piloting and evaluation of harm prevention initiatives in the Australian context. The Harm Reduction Innovation Fund is the vehicle for this collaboration.

Good alcohol and drug policy involves a balance between reducing the supply of drugs, reducing the demand, and reducing the harmful consequences. This initiative should be reviewed alongside our “Funding Drug Treatment” initiative.

> EXPERT COMMENTARY

Tony Trimmingham who lost his son to a heroin overdose and founded Family Drug Support Australia:

A compassionate but pragmatic approach that uses evidence will win over myth, morality and magic. ... many people change their lives but it often takes time and, in the meantime, lives can be lost. We support saving lives and reducing damage.⁴

Dr Alex Wodak, President of the Australian Drug Foundation, who plans to introduce pill testing at NSW music festivals:

The number of these deaths seems to be increasing, the number of the presentations to emergency departments of people attending these events is increasing, and it doesn't have to be like this.⁵

Associate Professor David Caldicott, Emergency Consultant in the ED, Calvary Hospital, Canberra:

Australia has become a country where politics has overtaken policy, and policy-based evidence seems to trump evidence-based policy. Nowhere is this more evident than in sectors representing those who have a small political voice, such as the AOD sector. ... Australia needs to maintain a nimble approach to adopting global best practice in the field.⁶

Professor Ann Roche, director of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction:

We are currently at a point in history where we can take stock of what has worked and what has not... We have the opportunity to rethink and renew some approaches that have not worked and consider scope for innovation⁷.

⁴ Trimmingham, T. Injecting rooms just the start of much-needed drug reform. The Sydney Morning Herald; 2014, 30 June
<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/injecting-rooms-just-the-start-of-muchneeded-drug-reform-20140628-zspqa.html>

⁵ Doctors plan to introduce pill testing at NSW music festivals, despite lack of government support. ABC News Online; 29 February 2016.
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-28/doctors-to-bring-pill-testing-to-nsw-music-festivals/7206298>

⁶ Harm Reduction Australia profile
<http://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/david-caldicott/>

⁷ Belot, H. Greens call for major overhaul of drug policy including pill testing and decriminalisation. The Canberra Times; 2016, 3 March (Retrieved from <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/greens-call-for-major-overhaul-of-drug-policy-including-pill-testing-and-decriminalisation-20160303-gn9f1t.html>)