



HARM REDUCTION

Reducing harm, saving lives

Ethical. Innovative. Necessary.

The Greens will restore Western Australia's reputation as a leader on innovative drug policy through implementing and funding a harm reduction model. 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 the current crisis worse rather than better.

For too long, the politics has ignored the research and has left harm reduction approaches under resourced, restricting us from undertaking innovative trials, putting lives at risk. Investing in harm reduction will provide the resources to expertly examine harm reduction approaches to provide a strong evidentiary base for the best policy and practice decisions.

The Greens recognise that when we treat personal drug use as a criminal issue, we use vital resources to punish the individual user 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:

- **Crack down** on drug dealers and drug traffickers
- **Call for the decriminalisation of personal possession** – those found in possession of

illicit drugs will be directed towards health care, rather than the criminal justice system

- **Call for the establishment of an evidence based pill testing system** to reduce the harm drugs cause and provide information to drug users on the content of illegal drugs to allow them to make more informed choices
- **Prioritise investment in treatment, support and 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.
- **Call for the Initiation of a Royal Commission** into how we address the issue of drug crime, why the current "war on drugs" is failing, the importance of addressing stigma and discrimination in order to ensure people receive the services they need to make positive changes and the importance of justice reinvestment programs to maximize the efficient use of resources.

> PILL TESTING

Too often in Western 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 harm's 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.¹

Despite the public support, and successful international trials of pill testing, there has been no government commitment in Western Australia to introduce or trial it.² Politicians need to remove barriers to sensible, targeted micro-policy trials such as drug testing at music festivals.

> PEER BASED INITIATIVES

Peer based drug user organisations provide an important voice for people who use illicit drugs and can also provide necessary expertise in the co-design of Alcohol and other Drug services. The Greens will invest in funding peer based user organisations to further promote harm reduction and better access to health care.

Provision of 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.

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 and Exchange Programs (NSEP)
- 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
- Ensure funding is made available to increase the number of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peer & support workers

- 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.

> AN HOLISTIC APPROACH

Political courage and leadership is required to ensure law enforcement and health sectors facilitate the piloting and evaluation of harm prevention initiatives in the Western Australian context.

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.³

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."⁴

¹ 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>

² As above.

³ 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-much-needed-drug-reform-20140628-zsppa.html>

⁴ ABC, *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>

**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.⁵

**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 innovation.⁶

⁵ Harm Reduction Australia profile

<http://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/david-caldicott/>

⁶ 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-overhaulofdrug-policy-including-pill-testing-and-decriminalisation-20160303-gn9f1t.html>)