



AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION
OF AIDS ORGANISATIONS

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10 April 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

I write in support of the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League's (AIVL) submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs on the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Drug Testing Trial) Bill 2018* ('The Bill').

AFAO is the peak national organisation for Australia's community HIV response. We are recognised nationally and globally for the leadership, policy expertise, coordination and support we provide. Through advocacy, policy and health promotion, we champion awareness, understanding and proactivity around HIV prevention, education, support and research. AFAO is particularly concerned to ensure that an evidence-based approach guides Australia's HIV response including in public policy. We work closely with our member organisation, AIVL, on policy issues for illicit drug users.

AFAO fully endorses AIVL's submission. In doing so, we highlight the following points:

- there is no evidence that punishing people for drug use leads to greater employment, increased income-support compliance or reduced drug-related harms related to drug use
- punishing people who use drugs and people receiving income support increases the stigma associated with drug use and deters people from accessing services
- an estimated 200,000-500,000 Australians each year are unable to access treatment for problems associated with drug and alcohol use¹
- we are concerned that consent for drug testing from people receiving income support in trial locations will be obtained through coercion under the threat of income support cancellation
- we fully endorse AIVL's recommendation that funds reserved for this trial be re-allocated to expand alcohol and other drug services for people who are actively seeking to address their drug use.

This trial is punitive in its effect and undermines an intended goal of the Bill which is to "better encourage and support [individuals] to pursue treatment." Punishing individuals for non-compliance is counter-productive to the goals of improving individual health outcomes. This undermines government investment in effective and evidence informed harm reduction initiatives, such as needle and syringe programs. Furthermore, we believe the Bill will actively work against the Australian Government's *National Drug Strategy 2017- 2026* and do little to address the broader structural factors that contribute to unemployment.

¹ National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre. (2014). *New Horizons: The review of alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia*.: [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/FD5975AFBFDC7013CA258082000F5DAB/\\$File/The-Review-of-alcohol-and-other-drug-treatment-services-in-Australia.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/FD5975AFBFDC7013CA258082000F5DAB/$File/The-Review-of-alcohol-and-other-drug-treatment-services-in-Australia.pdf)

A central tenet of Australia's response to HIV has been the development of peer-led programs to raise awareness about HIV prevention, testing and treatment. These programs delivered by community-based organisations enable deep levels of trust between organisations and the communities they serve. In turn, community-led organisations have supported affected communities to engage with key health and social services that support better health outcomes. AIVL and its member organisations are peer-led organisations that provide these supports for people who use alcohol and drugs and are trusted by people who use drugs to provide support services that reduce drug-related harm.

AFAO joins AIVL in recommending that the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs advise the Australian Government against proceeding with the Bill and recommends that funds reserved for this trial be re-allocated to expand alcohol and other drug services. AFAO recommends that this re-allocation include funding for services provided by community-based organisations that support people who use alcohol and other drugs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D O'Donnell', written in a cursive style.

Adj A/Prof Darryl O'Donnell
Chief Executive Officer