

## Item 3.5

### Action Must Follow 2024 Drug Summit

File No: S051491

#### Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

On 20 November 2023, Council unanimously resolved to support my [Lord Mayoral Minute](#) calling on the Premier to set a date and timeline for his proposed Drug Summit.

Council wanted to ensure that the Summit brought together Members of Parliament, experts in the medical and social aspects of drug use, including young people, police, community representatives, families, and people with experience of drug use and its effects.

Council also wanted the Summit to prioritise developing recommendations for action that would reduce the risk of drug-related deaths and contribute to reducing and ending the harm from illicit drug use. These should include drug checking/pill testing and the reform of the policing of drug use.

Disappointingly, unlike the groundbreaking 1999 Drug Summit, the Drug Summit on 4 and 5 December 2024 provided no opportunity to consider motions from participants or make formal recommendations.

While the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross was the most high-profile outcome of the 1999 Summit, as a result of a motion I moved, it also made over 170 recommendations relating to young people and drugs, treatment services, drug education, law enforcement, breaking the drugs and crimes cycle and community action.

It appears instead that the Summit's Co-Chairs, Carmel Tebbutt and John Brogden will prepare a report on the Summit's outcomes. Even more concerning are statements made by the Premier and NSW Minister for Health which appear to pre-empt the Summit's outcomes, including ruling out decriminalisation.

Given the lack of opportunity to formally put forward proposals for reform, a group of Summit participants released an open letter to the Premier requesting action. They include medical and health care professionals, representatives of community organisations and Members of Parliament. The letter is provided at Attachment A to the subject Minute.

The letter:

- notes Unharm has created a plan for a drug checking implementation pilot that NSW can adopt and stresses the need to act ahead of this summer's festival season;
- requests legislative amendments to allow NSW Health to work with drug and alcohol service providers and communities to deliver additional supervised injecting facilities in other locations in the state;
- notes that application of the drug diversion program is open to inequity; and requests that eligibility criteria should be based on set quantities of drugs found on a person;

- requests NSW adopt a strategy to protect people from developing and sustaining dependence on prescription drugs; and
- requests medicinal cannabis to be treated like any other prescription drug in driving laws with offences based on driving under the influence and not the detection of traces of the substance.

The letter expresses hope that these issues will be considered by the NSW Government as a priority and concludes:

“We cannot wait for more reports, reviews and delayed government responses when we know we could be saving lives now. We call on the government to urgently adopt these key reforms.”

I agree. Accordingly, I am recommending that Council endorse the Open Letter from Delegates of the 2024 Drug Summit.

I also understand that the NSW Minister for Health has asked the Co-Chairs of the Drug Summit to prepare an interim report ahead of the upcoming music festival season, which may include recommendations for a pill testing trial, which I support.

### **Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council endorse the Open Letter from Delegates of the 2024 Drug Summit as shown at Attachment A to the subject Minute;
- (B) the Lord Mayor be requested to sign the Open Letter on behalf of the Council of the City of Sydney; and
- (C) if the NSW Government commits to a pill testing trial, the Chief Executive Officer be requested to work with relevant stakeholders to help facilitate the trial including appropriate temporary location in our area.

### **COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO**

Lord Mayor

### **Attachments**

**Attachment A.** Open Letter from 2024 Drug Summit

# **Attachment A**

**Open Letter from 2024 Drug Summit**

# Open Letter from the 2024 Drug Summit

10 December 2024

The Hon. Chris Minns, MP  
Premier  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Premier

We, the undersigned commend the government for holding the 2024 Drug Summit and the co-chairs for running what we hope will be a catalyst for change.

The 2024 NSW Drug Summit heard from those with lived and living experience, families and friends of people impacted by drug use, experts, and frontline service providers from city and country. Their evidence built on the findings of the important Special commission of inquiry into the drug 'ice' and demonstrated strong community support for new approaches to drug use.

We now have an opportunity to move forward on key reforms that have proven to save lives.

## 1) Drug Checking

We heard from families who lost loved ones because the drugs they took were stronger than they thought or contained contaminants. Other states and territories have started drug checking and informing people who use drugs about the potency and substance makeup of their drugs before they are consumed, providing an important intervention that is changing behaviour and saving lives.

NSW Health reported that opioids and fatal nitazines are turning up in a wide range of drugs and high strength MDMA tablets are circulating in the community. New South Wales is forecast to have one of the hottest summers on record, elevating the risks of overdose and overheating.

Unharm has created a plan for a drug checking implementation pilot that New South Wales can adopt, and we need to act ahead of this summer's festival season.

## 2) Supervised Injecting Facilities

The last 1999 Drug Summit delivered the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross after hearing from experts and people who use drugs and their families about the tragic impacts of street injecting. Since the centre opened in 2001, it has helped thousands of people who use drugs stay alive, providing them with a pathway to support and treatment. It has also taken drug use off the street.

We heard that intravenous drug use is not limited to inner city Sydney and that other areas could benefit from supervised injecting facilities.

The legislation should be amended to allow NSW Health to work with drug and alcohol service providers and communities to deliver additional supervised injecting facilities in other locations in the state.

### 3) Diversion Program

The diversion program was introduced to divert people using low levels of drugs away from the criminal justice system, however we heard that it is not being applied consistently with some communities including First Nations communities rarely offered diversion.

The program's discretionary application leaves it open to inequity; eligibility criteria should instead be based on set quantities of drugs found.

### 4) Prescription Drugs

We heard about people with prescription drug dependencies that were maintained by acquiring multiple prescriptions from multiple doctors. The health system needs safeguards to prevent it from facilitating drug dependence with built-in interventions to ensure anyone with or at risk of a prescription drug dependence is identified and helped.

New South Wales needs a strategy to protect people from developing and sustaining dependence on prescription drugs.

### 5) Cannabis

The legalisation of medicinal cannabis has provided health benefits to many people however the crime for driving with traces of cannabis continues to apply to people lawfully using medicinal cannabis. The absence of an exemption acts as a de facto criminalisation of medicinal cannabis, limiting access and resulting in people driving in fear.

Medicinal cannabis should be treated like any other prescription drug in driving laws with offences based on driving under the influence not the detection of traces of the substance.

We acknowledge several other critical reforms have been raised at the summit and in its lead up. These include increasing funding to alcohol and other drug services across the state (especially in rural and regional areas) and reducing stigma of those with lived experience of drug use. We hope these issues will also be considered by the government as a priority.

We cannot wait for more reports, reviews and delayed government responses when we know we could be saving lives now. We call on the government to urgently adopt these key reforms.

Yours sincerely

Alex Greenwich MP  
Member for Sydney

Gerard Hayes  
Secretary  
Health Services Union NSW/ACT/QLD

Dr Will Tregoning  
CEO  
Unharm

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham MLC  
Legalise Cannabis Party

Emma Maiden  
General Manager Advocacy & External Relations  
Uniting

Mitch Wilson  
Managing Director  
Australian Festivals Association

Dr Rebekah Hoffman  
Faculty Chair  
RACGP NSW&ACT

Pastor, Jon Owen  
CEO  
Wayside Chapel

Angus McFarland  
Secretary  
Australian Services Union (NSW/ACT Branch)

Cara Varian  
CEO  
NSW Council of Social Services

Andrew Holland  
Executive Director  
Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation

Jennie Ross-King  
Parent and Campaigner

Shaye Candish  
General Secretary  
NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association

Bishop Peter Stuart  
Bishop of Newcastle

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam MLC  
Australian Labor Party

The Hon. Cameron Murphy MLC  
Australian Labor Party

Sonia Hornery MP  
Australian Labor Party

Dr Michael Holland MP  
Australian Labor Party

Judy Hannan MP  
Member for Wollondilly

The Hon. Emma Hurst MLC  
Animal Justice Party

Helen Dalton MP  
Member for Murray