

Attachment A

Open Letter from 2024 Drug Summit

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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

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Member for Sydney

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Secretary
Health Services Union NSW/ACT/QLD

Dr Will Tregoning
CEO
Unharm

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham MLC
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