



Address to Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, 7th December 2018

‘A critical examination of welfare state constructions of income support recipients and addiction’ by Associate Professor Philip Mendes (Department of Social Work, Monash University)



- The Australian welfare state is very expensive, but no consensus about aims or values.
- Dominant neoliberal view medicalizes income support recipients as welfare dependent as noted by Professor Sanford Schram
- But really chronic material disadvantage
- In my opinion, disadvantage reflects both individual agency and structural factors
- Social capital or positive social networks is key to providing opportunities for those from tough backgrounds



- Examples of drug and alcohol service users targeted:
- 1) Compulsory income management including Cashless Debit Card
- 2) Removal of mutual obligation exemptions
- 3) Two year drug testing trial, opposed by Labor and Greens Senators, there seems to have been little consultation with local communities or service users
- 4) South Australian Government drug testing of parents of children in child protection system



- What do neoliberals believe, and why do they talk about welfare dependency?
- Neo liberals attribute poverty to individual deficits as per views of Lawrence Mead
- Welfare payments harm recipients according to Charles Murray
- Dependence on welfare is an addiction or illness not dissimilar to substance use or gambling.
- Solution is to discipline recipients so they choose self-reliance as in paid employment over welfare.



- The limitations of the neoliberal/welfare dependency argument
 - 1) No real evidence that welfare recipients hold different values or attitudes, see studies by Mark Rank in USA, Tracy Shildrick in UK, Daly and Kelly in Northern Ireland, Fred Argy and John Murphy et al in Australia, and recent report by Good Shepherd in Victoria.
 - 2) The model ignores the fact that those who grow up in poverty start behind the line, and don't have the same opportunities as others.



- **Towards effective intervention: Co-design program development with service users**
- Bottom up process that facilitates active engagement with the lived expertise of service users; Informed by community development principles such as social inclusion, participation and empowerment.
- Co-design approach would include service users in program planning, delivery and review/evaluation
- Differs substantially from existing government frameworks for income management, drug testing trials and conditional welfare generally.



- **BIO: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PHILIP MENDES** has been a social work and social policy practitioner and educator for over 30 years, with particular experience in the fields of income support, young people transitioning from state out-of-home care, social workers and policy practice, community development, and illicit drugs. He has numerous publications in local and international journals, and is the author or co-author of 12 books including *Australia's Welfare Wars* three editions (2003, 2008 & 2017), *Harm Minimisation, Zero Tolerance and Beyond: The Politics of Illicit Drugs in Australia* (2004), *Inside the Welfare Lobby: A history of the Australian Council of Social Service* (2006), *Young people leaving state out-of-home care: Australian Policy and Practice* (2011) *Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: International Research, Policy and Practice* (2016), and *Empowerment and control in the Australian welfare state: A critical analysis of Australian social policy since 1972* (2018) – Philip.Mendes@monash.edu