

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cannabis Inquiry: lost opportunity perpetuates harm

The report from the Inquiry into Cannabis in Victoria, while asserting support for drug law reform, does not recommend it.

While this is a step in the right direction, in light of the failures of prohibition in reducing cannabis use and harms, it is also a missed opportunity.

While supporting many of the recommendations, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) believes this is a missed opportunity to divert thousands of people from the criminal justice system.

Mr Sam Biondo, executive officer of VAADA says, 'the report, in recommending a further examination of impacts of legalizing cannabis, effectively delays any positive reform through seeking information that we already have. There are an increasing number of jurisdictions introducing cannabis law reform without the sky falling in. While we appreciate that there are currently competing priorities, there are thousands being unnecessarily funneled into the justice system for minor cannabis possession offences.'

The report notes that 94% of all cannabis arrests in Australia are related to possession and use.

'The current focus on policing increases stigma, reducing help seeking behavior. It also locks down a business model making billions for illicit drug traffickers. It puts quality control for a substance that 36% of all Australians over 14 years of age have tried in the hands of drug traffickers. And it takes valuable resourcing away from mental health, alcohol and other drug and other vital health and social supports.'

The report makes a number of positive reforms relating to access to drug diversion and cautions, particularly for young people which may go some way in reducing adverse interactions with the justice system.

Mr Biondo continues, 'recommendations relating to diversion and cautioning should be supported, as should further evidence based prevention and counselling activities within school environments. We note, however, that despite 16% of all Victorians engaging treatment presenting with cannabis as the leading drug, the report has provided little focus among the findings and recommendations on this fact.'

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VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.