

..... combating **Alcohol & Other Drugs**

Our Plan

The Australian Democrats do not endorse illegal drug use but recognise that it is an undeniable part of many people's lives and legal drugs – alcohol and tobacco – have a greater impact on health and wellbeing. Open and honest debate about the health and social impacts is necessary to tackle substance use.

The objective of drug and alcohol policy must be to discourage use that is harmful to health, society and the economy. Policy must be based on the best available evidence, not moralising and fear-mongering.

Australia has a \$15.3b alcohol misuse problem and 3000 Australians die each year from an alcohol-related disease. Young people are starting drinking earlier with over half of all 17 year olds starting before they were 14. One Australian teenager dies/week from alcohol fuelled circumstances. Teenage binge drinkers are more likely to have alcohol dependence, criminal conviction, leave school early, earn less and have a mental health problem in adulthood than others yet the alcohol industry targets young people, particularly with alcopops, ignoring its own alcohol advertising code.

The real social costs of illicit drug abuse are estimated to have risen between 1998/99 and 2004/05 by 11.3% to \$35b/year according to a government review. The use of cannabis and heroin has come down but methamphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine use is rising. It's clear that the 'tough on drugs' approaches of the major parties are not working.

- Expanded **needle and syringe exchange** programs and medically supervised **injection** centres where needed
- Ongoing **methadone** maintenance treatment for the majority of people addicted to heroin, with medical **prescription of heroin** in warranted circumstances
- Expanded **specific drug courts**, diversion programs that offer an alternative to prison sentencing and penalties that reflect the relative harms of different drugs
- Expanded supervised **detoxification** facilities and more funding for **treatment and support and rehabilitation** services, with increased flexibility for those that cater for drug dependent adults with children
- **School programs** based on scientific evidence of the relative harms of drug-taking
- Trials and a regulatory framework for prescription of **pharmaceutical cannabis, ecstasy and heroin** for medical purposes
- The Australian Law Reform Commission to review current **drug use and possession laws and sentencing** and to examine decriminalisation of possession and use of cannabis and its distribution capture in commercial and tax law.
- **Research** into the medium to long term effects of the use of drugs and effective preventative and harm reduction interventions including testing and treatments
- Targeted **training** for health, welfare and criminal justice professionals in responding to inhalant abuse, harsher penalties for non-Opal petrol trafficking and a focus on alternatives like glue
- An independent alcohol **advertising regulator** with strong enforcement powers and prohibition of alcohol sponsorship in sport, entertainment and the arts
- Public **education** programs to warn against underage drinking
- Tighter controls on the **sale and supply** of alcohol
- More explicit **labeling** on the alcohol content of drinks, on the health risks to minors and on safe levels of consumption
- **Tax** all alcohol products according to alcohol content and introduce the same tax and excise treatment to low and mid strength RTDs and wine as is applied to low and mid strength beer