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MEDIA RELEASE

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POLITICIANS AT RAVES & DOCTORS GIVING UP ON DRUG ABUSE

When politicians have to go to raves to “keep in touch” with the drug issue and emergency room doctors say that we have to accept that our young people will use drugs we are in real trouble.

What is it that politicians and some doctors do not understand about drug policy? In Sweden where drug use is one third of other European countries and where less than 2% of their youth use drugs like cannabis and amphetamines we could look to them for solutions. Instead we continue to replicate the Netherlands policies that have failed dismally.

“When medical professionals try to play politics with drug policy they are endangering the lives and future of our youth. Dr. Caldicott stated on 891 ABC radio on Friday afternoon 8th December that abstinence based policies are not effective, he failed to acknowledge the success that Sweden has had over the past thirty years” Ms Bressington said.

Mr. Antonio Maria Costa Secretary of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated in a report in September, 2006 “Countries have the drug problems they deserve. In Europe the level of drug use is rising, but not so in Sweden. Their policy and approaches have targeted cannabis and amphetamine type drugs at a street level.”

In Sweden cannabis use is 1/15th that of Australia and amphetamine use 1/40th that of Australia.

“Dr. Caldicott stated that the drop in heroin addiction is not due to policing, but rather a drop in the supply – that is a direct effect of policing – supply reduction. How can we hope to reduce the harms and use when we have an attitude of drug use being normal teenage behaviour. It is acceptance that we can do nothing and a defeatist attitude” Ms Bressington said.

The UNODC report also stated that “other countries could learn a lot from Sweden’s approach”. In parliament on Wednesday the Minister for Mental Health and Substance abuse claimed that Sweden was “seeking advice from drug and alcohol services in S.A”. She said that the National Coordinator on Drug Policy in Sweden had approached DASSA for advice. Ms Bressington presented a statement from the National Drug Policy Coordinator in Sweden saying *“The statement is a bluff. I have never approached drug and alcohol services in S.A. on any issue, nor do I ever intend to do so”*. This caused the Opposition to call for the Minister’s resignation for misleading parliament.

“This is an example of the lengths that some will go to convince the South Australian public that we are getting it right, when in fact we are now doing exactly what Sweden was doing when it faced the humanitarian crisis that made them move away from harm minimization to a policy that has turned that country around” Ms Bressington said.

Dr. Caldicott also stated that his efforts to introduce pill testing have been thwarted at every turn. Ms Bressington said that the AMA has asked Dr. Caldicott for an evidence-based submission that will show the efficacy of pill testing and to date they have not received any such submission.

“I have met with Dr. Christopher Cain, President of the AMA in S.A. and he informed me that Dr. Caldicott has not provided the submission to the AMA. This tells me two things:

- 1. There is no such evidence base to produce or*
- 2. Dr. Caldicott is using this as a political football to keep the debate going.*

If the AMA were convinced that pill testing would be beneficial they would sanction such an approach. However, the AMA has stated on numerous occasions that it is sending the wrong message about drugs to our youth.”