

## NEWSLETTER



September 2015

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### NEXT MEETING

Thursday 24 September 2015, 7.30pm  
St Ninian's Uniting Church hall,  
cnr Mouat and Brigalow Sts, LYNEHAM

Meetings are followed by refreshments and time for a chat.

### Editorial

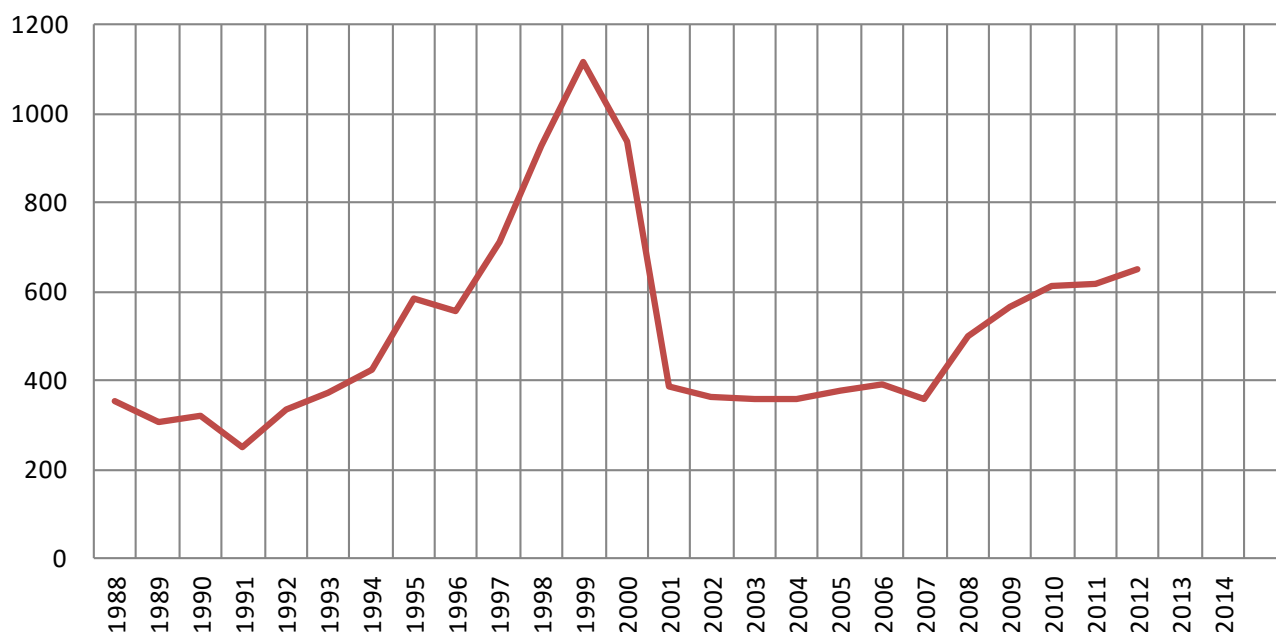
#### By the numbers after 20 years

Many will be aware that FFDLR is preparing a book about its 20 years of existence. Many things have happened over those 20 years; some battles have been lost but some ground has been gained.

In the larger scheme of things has much changed in Australia? Perhaps one way to judge is to examine some statistical indicators.

When FFDLR was formed there was a great deal of concern about the high level of opioid overdose deaths. At that time it had grown from 351 deaths in 1988 to 582 in 1995. The high number of deaths was a factor in the formation of FFDLR. In 2012, the latest date for which data is available deaths had risen to 649. The chart below indicates a peak in 1999 which, together with the rise to and the fall from that peak represents a glut in supply of heroin.

### Accidental Opioid deaths Aged 15 - 54 years



However despite these deaths only about 0.2 percent of the Australian population or about 51,000 people used the drug in 2013.

The most commonly used drug was cannabis the use of which had reduced from 13.1 percent in 1995 to 10.3 percent in 2013.

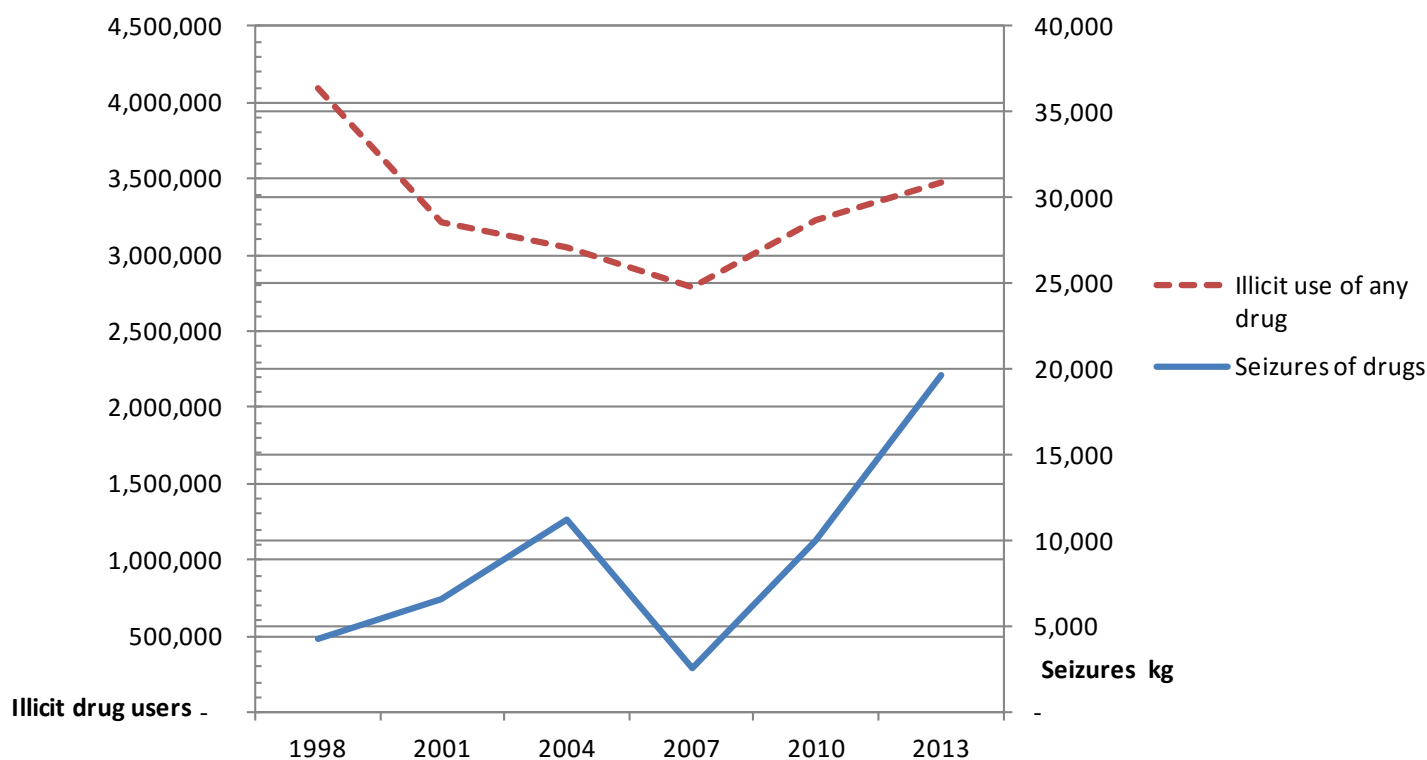
Methamphetamine, a group which includes speed and the now infamous ice was used by 2.1 percent of the population in 1995 is still only used by 2.1 percent of the population. There has been an internal shift in that users have moved from the powder form to the crystal or ice form of the drug.

In total some 12 percent of the Australian population, or almost 3.5 million people used an illicit drug in 2013, whereas 14.2 percent used in 1995 representing 3.0 million people.

Law enforcement action has continued to try and prevent the import, manufacture and use of drugs. In 1995 some 63.3 percent of arrests were for possession or use. By 2013/14 the arrest rate of users had risen to 83 percent.

In 1995 some 4.2 tonnes of illicit drugs were seized, 1.6 tonnes was of cannabis and 298 kilograms was of heroin. In 2013/14 drug seizures had risen to 27 tonnes of which 7 tonnes was cannabis and 158 kilograms was heroin. Amphetamine type drugs seized in 1997/98 was 182 kilograms and had risen to over 4 tonnes in 2013/2014. The chart below indicates that there is little or no relationship between the number of people using drugs and the quantity of drugs seized.

### Drug Users and Drug Seizures



From a users' perspective drugs have remained easy to very easy to obtain for a number of years and prices have remained stable.

Globally in 1995, 249,919 hectares were under cultivation of opium poppies which represented a potential production of 4,452 tonnes of opium or 445 tonnes of heroin. In 2014 Afghan opium poppy cultivation was under cultivation in 224,000 hectares. Since Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the world's illicit heroin, world production is estimated to be 714 tonnes.

#### Conclusion

So heroin production has increased, drugs and their price remain stable, the number of drug users is independent (ie not causally related to) the amounts of drug seized, law enforcement has increased the

number of users that they arrest to 83 percent and the number of opioid deaths is again increasing. To me that does not signify progress of the aim of prohibition - ie to stop the supply, manufacture, distribution and use of drugs.

## Andrew's Blog

Written by Andrew Byrne .. Clinic web page: <http://methadone-research.blogspot.com/>

Dear Colleagues,

There is no more 'final' statistic regarding drug use than overdose deaths. And in England the official figures go back to Victorian times, then often involving opium, laudanum and other strong drugs including alcohol. The British Coroner's Act of 1844 was ahead of its time and even pre-dated the famous Broad Street Pump reports of the London cholera epidemic of 1854. The latter is sometimes quoted as the first exercise in modern, scientific public health.

The BMJ [British Medical Journal] has reported increasing overdose deaths in the UK which are little short of disastrous, reflecting experience in America - doubling in a few short years and overtaking other causes of death like a tragic game of leap-frog. The UK now has about 50 overdose deaths per million of population or 3346 in 2014 of which 952 were from heroin or morphine. In Portugal it is about a tenth of this rate according to EMCDDA.

The familiar story of increasing overdoses happened in Portugal before 2001 when a forward thinking and science based experiment was undertaken moving away from prohibition.

Portugal decriminalised personal drug use 14 years ago, heralding a new era in public health in that small country. Since the liberalisation experiment the country has gone from a pariah to a paragon of public health outcomes. HIV, overdose and addiction rates have dropped significantly while resources have been strongly diverted to treatment and social services. The UK and USA have comparable drug control laws strongly relying on punishment, in stark contrast to Portugal.

Like seeing refugees on a television screen, overdose deaths only come home to us when they are personalised by a friend, family member or particularly moving portrayal such as the recent footage of a dead young boy on a beach in Turkey. Why is nobody taking notice of one of the biggest and longest and most successful real-life experiments in drug law reform? Why are those supporting prohibition so successful in beating a drum which has no scientific or empirical basis? And their actions are leading to preventable deaths every single day. I recommend a 14 minute talk by Johann Hari about his 'journey' investigating addiction\*.

<http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4754> BMJ article.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/06/05/why-hardly-anyone-dies-from-a-drug-overdose-in-portugal/>

\* [https://www.ted.com/talks/johann\\_hari\\_everything\\_you\\_think\\_you\\_know\\_about\\_addiction\\_is\\_wrong?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/johann_hari_everything_you_think_you_know_about_addiction_is_wrong?language=en) Everything You Think You Know About Addiction Is Wrong. Johann Hari. TED Talks

## Date for your diary

We have been working very hard on FFDLR's book for our 20 year anniversary. The book is titled: The Drug Law Wars; Twenty years of families fighting at the front.

The book has been written to commemorate 20 years of FFDLR fighting to right a wrong, for what will provide better protection for our children so that they have a better chance of living through their drug using experience. So that children in the future will survive the dangers that currently characterise exposure in the drug culture. This book also highlights the significant events and chronicles the fight that parents have had to change the drug laws: parents who have had experience, often tragic experience, and have seen the fundamental flaws in the current system. It has also involved many community members who have not had personal experiences but are convinced that the prohibition drug laws cause more harm than ever intended.

**Launch date for the book is 18 November. Please put it in your diary. Invitations will be issued shortly.**

**Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc**

invites you to its

# **20th Annual Remembrance Ceremony**

**'for those who lose their life to illicit drugs'**

**Monday 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2015**

**12.30pm – 1.30pm**  
at

**Weston Park, Yarralumla, ACT**

to take place at the dedicated memorial  
located on the right of Weston Park Road  
opposite Prescott Lane junction.

**Speakers include:**

- Kate Carnell AO, CEO Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
as Chief Minister of the ACT in 1996 Ms Carnell unveiled the plaque at the first ceremony
- Rev Graham Long AM, Pastor, The Wayside Chapel
- Tony Trimmingham OAM, CEO Family Drug Support
- Musical items by 'The Converted'

Refreshments will be served following the ceremony.

**Reading of Names .....**

If you have a family member or friend who has lost their life to illicit drugs and would like them remembered by name at the ceremony please phone Marion on 6254 2961 or email: [mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au](mailto:mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au)

Website: [www.ffdlr.org.au](http://www.ffdlr.org.au)

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