



NEW SOUTH WALES NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIAN NURSING AND MIDWIFERY FEDERATION NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH



POSITION STATEMENT ON HARM REDUCTION

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NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association
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Position Statement on Harm Reduction

IT IS THE POSITION OF THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION THAT:

Australia has a long-standing history of implementing a harm minimisation approach to address the range of issues associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs (illicit drugs and pharmaceutical drugs). A harm minimisation approach recognises that alcohol and other drug use is complex phenomenon, and that people should be supported to reduce harms to themselves and the wider community¹.

Harm from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs impacts individuals and communities, and can include health harms, social harms, and economic harms. The National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 outlines three pillars for harm minimisation: demand reduction; supply reduction; and harm reduction².

Harm reduction refers to:

“the policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise the health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws. Harm reduction is grounded in justice and human rights. It focuses on positive change and working with people without judgement, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that they stop using drugs as a precondition of support” – Harm Reduction International³

Various existing initiatives within New South Wales (NSW) include the:

- Needle and Syringe Program (NSP)
- Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC)
- Opioid Treatment Program (OTP)
- Take-home naloxone program
- Measures to reduce alcohol related violence in Sydney and Newcastle
- Smoke-free legislation
- Drink and drug driving legislation

These initiatives have: reduced transmission of blood-borne viruses; reduced deaths from overdose; provided referrals to treatment and support services for people in need⁴; reduced harms associated with passive smoke inhalation⁵; reduced harms associated with drink and drug driving⁶.



THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES ASSOCIATION RECOGNISES THAT:

- Alcohol and other drug use is common in Australia – according to the 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 43% of Australians aged over 14 had illicitly used a drug in their lifetime; 16.4% had used one in the last 12 months⁷;
- Alcohol and other drug use occur across a continuum, from occasional use to dependent use – not everyone who uses drugs and alcohol will develop a problem associated with use;⁸
- Anyone can experience problems relating to alcohol or drug use, however some people within our communities are more at risk than others; people who experience marginalisation, trauma, or socio-economic disadvantage are more at risk of developing problems relating to alcohol and other drug use;⁹
- The application of criminal law to control substance use in Australia is an approach that is failing - there is a need to explore alternative models that can assist in the control of drug use and reduce the harms associated with illicit drug use.¹⁰

THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES ASSOCIATION ADOPTS THE POSITION THAT:

- A harm reduction approach to alcohol and other drug use is best practice – issues related to drug and alcohol use should be treated primarily as health issues, not criminal issues¹¹;
- The NSWNMA has been a leader in its advocacy for harm minimisation, and has demonstrated a commitment to harm minimisation by supporting existing, evidence-based, harm reduction strategies;
- The NSWNMA calls on the NSW Government to implement the recommendations from the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'. These include opening additional supervised drug consumption facilities; implementing pill testing (also called drug checking); an increase in funding for alcohol and other drug services; education to reduce stigma; and drug law reform¹².

This position statement should be read in conjunction with the NSWNMA [Policy on Drug and Alcohol Issues](#).

REFERENCES

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4. NSW Health – HIV Strategy 2021-2025: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/endinghiv/Publications/nsw-hiv-strategy-2021-2025.pdf>
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7. Department of Health - The 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/contents/summary>
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11. Ibid
12. Ibid