

Stewart Stubbs

Wentworth Falls NSW

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The Secretariat
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Room S1.61
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600



2 February 2004

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my concern at the proposed changes to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Specifically changes to the Act, which will no longer consider individuals with illicit substance use dependency to be considered 'disabled'. The implication of this will have far reaching effects for people who are struggling with illicit drug use.

In my experience as an Alcohol and Other Drugs Counsellor the majority of individuals who take illicit substances have underlying mental health issues, particularly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in relation to childhood sexual assault, in addition to severe depression and high levels of anxiety. These mental health issues seriously diminish a person's ability to function at what might be considered within a 'normal range', when compared to individuals who do not have such underlying mental health difficulties. The mental health issues mentioned above impact on relationships, employment opportunities, daily commitments, the economic status of an individual and the contributions they are able to make to society in general.

Discriminating against people who have an illicit substance use problem will not help them engage in services, which might assist them nor will it change their substance use pattern. It will only further marginalise people with substance use difficulties and sever important financial support e.g. a disability benefit.

Cutting access to a Disability Benefit may have the effect of increasing stress and may cause an adverse result of people increasing illicit substance use, to manage increased stress due to financial hardship. The drug use although not a solution does provide the perception of managing problems often experienced by individuals who take illicit substances.

Drug dependency is increasingly recognised as a chronic long-term condition. Individuals and families struggling against chronic conditions need support and encouragement to make changes, not penalties.

I strongly urge the Committee to reject changes to the DDA and not discriminate against people who take illicit drugs by minimising their situation.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stewart Stubbs".

Stewart Stubbs
A&OD Counsellor