

WHAT CAN BE DONE

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Ms Sophie Dunstone,
Committee Secretary,
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

Dear Ms Dunstone,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry.

Thank you for inviting me to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement inquiry into crystal methamphetamine.

As a Churchill Fellow, I made a private submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee in Melbourne on 27 July 2015, with the transcript accurately representing my submission.

In my submission, I identified a significant cohort of young people with severe substance misuse problems who are appearing before the Children's Court of Victoria in either the Criminal or Family (child protection) Divisions of the Court and who are not accessing voluntary drug rehabilitation services.

My Churchill Fellowship involved researching international drug and alcohol services for young people. I concluded that mandatory (non-punitive) treatment can be effective for the cohort of troubled young people not currently accessing voluntary treatment services. My findings are detailed in the report *'What can be done? – residential treatment options for young people suffering substance abuse/mental illness'* (attached).

I have considered the final Report of the National Ice Task Force (NIT), the government's response to the NIT report and the National Ice Action Strategy 2015.

I am heartened by both the recommendations of NIT and the positive government commitments to increase investment in treatment and to ensure enhanced research on effective treatments.

Whilst NIT refers to a review of treatment for youth justice (those already sentenced and detained), I wish to express concern that effective, dedicated non-punitive treatment for young people in the community or on remand (not undergoing sentence) was not given specific attention in the NIT report or government responses.

In my report and submission to the Committee, I refer to the fact that 89% of young people in youth custody in Victoria have alcohol or drug use related to their offending, that 60% have been victims of abuse, trauma or neglect and 59% have had child protection involvement. The intergenerational cycle is continuing as 13% of those in detention (under 18 years) are already parents. There are more than 500 young people in residential care in Victoria and a large number of these have been subject to harm, abuse or neglect and have substance abuse issues.

Many of these young people do not access voluntary services due to their chaotic and deeply troubled lives. A circuit breaker is required. Mandatory options are essential in order to stop the downward spiral of their lives, to provide effective treatment and as the majority have ceased

attending school at a very young age, to re-connect them with education and training. Effective after-care in the community is also essential.

Urgent action is required to provide early intervention services for these troubled and most vulnerable young people. Therapeutic treatment is required to arrest the deleterious effects of ice on their health and to attempt to avoid the consequent economic and social costs to the community of not intervening.

I have formed a 'What can be done' steering committee which meets regularly. It is comprised of many professionals seeking the changes recommended in my report and submission. The committee includes CEOs of various voluntary substance abuse treatment agencies, psychiatrists, representatives from education, police and members of the legal profession.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Bowles

Magistrate

