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AUTHORISED:

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From: John Emily, MP (NCPD), on behalf of John

To: Mr. ...

Subject: ...

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TO: The Secretary of the Committee

13 MARCH 2007

Enquiry into the Support of Illicit Drug Use on Families

House of Representatives

PO Box 6021

Parliament House Canberra

ACT 2600

1 - The Financial Social and Personal Cost to Families

Where to start on the chaos of life as you watch a loved one, in our case our son, destroy themselves with drugs. One is in a state of permanent grief not just for six months or a year but for decades.

In our case it's been eleven years so far. You tend to isolate yourself from friend and family so you really have no support because of;

A] of the stigma attached and people can be very judgemental

B] you don't want to burden other people with such a long term problem

Unless you've lived this nightmare it is very hard to comprehend how this totally takes over your whole being. The chaos it creates to a marriage and to brothers and sisters lives as well – it is truly heartbreaking and I believe the problem is only going to escalate if something serious is not done and then a lot more lives will be touched.

The drug epidemic has far reaching consequences for all of society.

Then last but not least, the financial cost to my family is horrific. There is no Carer's Allowance for families dedicated to saving their loved one's life – no tax deductions for a child who is now costing much more than they ever did as a young child.

Mind you it would be worth every cent if we live to see our son's life saved and the joy of seeing him live a normal healthy life again (if that ever happens because relapse can always be around the next corner). I'm not talking in the hundreds of dollars but the thousands of dollars spent on debts, clothing, food, healthcare, Doctors, nutritionists, psychologists and the list goes on including the costs of the family's health needs as this

suffers also.

2 - The Impact of Harm Minimization

This is the only help available to an addict. At least if they have safe and supervised places to go (which is also safer for society) or in the case of methadone, which our son was on for eighteen months, this enabled him to hold down a job and brought some form of normality back into his life. Of course he eventually had to suffer getting off the methadone which he was determined to do and we were very proud of him for this and the progress which he made in his life – still a way to go yet though.

3 - Ways to Strengthen Families

Families definitely need support to help them survive and keep strong and together especially on an emotional and physical level. I have attended a naturopath for several years to support my physical health as I did not wish to start taking anti-depressants or tranquilisers. I now go to a support group and have attended "Stepping Stones" workshop to help me learn coping skills and for general support which has been of great value to me as I never had anyone to talk to about this apart from my husband. I chose not to tell friends, and had really isolated myself from any social contact.

People may take the attitude "Oh well, they did it to themselves." However, they make the decision to experiment with drugs with immature minds in their early teenage years and peer group pressure.

Our Son would never make the decision to experiment with drugs now at 25 years old and regrets greatly ever having touched them. He looks longingly at photos of himself prior to any form of drug use and says openly he wished he had never touched drugs.

Do not think that this will never touch *your* life, because it could be a grandchild if not a child of your own. The people in my support group are some of the nicest people I have ever met, certainly not monsters or social outcasts who you would suspect may have drug dependant loved ones.

Yours faithfully