



Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Amphetamines and Other Synthetic Drugs

Bluelight and its members would like to sincerely thank the senators undertaking this inquiry for the opportunity to present their experiences and opinions on the topic of how best to manage the problems caused by amphetamines and other synthetic drugs in Australia. The following quote outlines Bluelight's mission:

“Bluelight (www.bluelight.ru) is an international message board that educates the public about responsible drug use (with a focus on MDMA) by promoting free discussion. We advocate harm reduction and attempt to eliminate misinformation. Bluelight is funded by private donations and maintained by a team of volunteers.

Bluelight does not condone or condemn the use of illegal drugs. Bluelight is a place for people to ask questions and educate themselves about drugs so they can make more informed decisions regarding their personal use. Other programs that advocate complete abstinence have had limited success, so Bluelight anticipates that people will continue to use illegal drugs regardless of the potential health or legal consequences. We want to encourage people to take personal responsibility for the choices they make regarding their drug consumption.

Harm reduction is the practice of taking reasonable measures to minimise the risks from drug use. Common harm reduction activities include encouraging people to exercise moderation in their drug consumption and to understand the purity or dose of the drug they are consuming. There is no such thing as safe drug use, but if someone is educated in the general principles of harm reduction, they increase the odds that their drug use will not lead to short-term disasters or long-term negative consequences.

Beyond harm reduction, Bluelight also seeks to educate the public about drugs by summarizing whatever information is known about a subject. Bluelight aims to deliver accurate information in an easy to understand manner that emphasises safety. We also try to eliminate misinformation whether it exaggerates or understates the danger. If facts are unavailable, then honest anecdotal stories can provide useful information so people have an idea of what to expect.

Since Bluelight seeks to reach the widest possible audience, we take a balanced approach that allows the discussion of both the positive and negative aspects of drug use. We believe that education and harm reduction are more effective than using scare tactics or exaggerating negative claims. Anyone looking through our site will be able to find examples of irresponsible behavior, but we believe it does not glorify recklessness but instead reinforces the idea that people need to be more cautious. Everyone is encouraged to candidly discuss past experiences and ask any questions they might have.”

Source: <http://www.bluelight.ru/vb/faq.php?faq=about>

Australian Drug Discussion Sub-forum

The Australia/Asia/NZ/Middle East Drug Discussion Forum was created in an attempt to provide a forum for regionally specific discussion of drugs and health issues that arise from the recreational use of drugs. This is the section of Bluelight where the following drug user experiences and opinions were collected. The forum can be accessed at <http://www.bluelight.ru/vb/forumdisplay.php?forumid=45>

More information about Bluelight can be accessed at <http://www.bluelight.ru/vb/faq.php?faq=about>

Related websites mentioned below include www.pillreports.com and www.erowid.org. Pill Reports is a global database of user reports and test results from ecstasy tablets. Erowid is a vast store of both scientific information and user experiences related to psychoactive drugs.

Seventeen individuals took the opportunity to submit their stories and their views on drug policy. Common themes emerge as these stories are told, however a summary of these themes has specifically not been written, in order to encourage a full reading of the submission. It is hoped that the diversity of both drug experiences, and the ways in which drug users are affected by policies, becomes apparent after reading all of the contributions. Minor edits have been undertaken for the sake of clarity and to further ensure anonymity. Some colloquial terms have been defined within the text [*indicated like this*].

Further questions can be addressed to the facilitator of this submission, Monica Barratt, Doctoral Candidate at the National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University (email monica.barratt@postgrad.curtin.edu.au). Please note that Monica is not an official spokesperson for Bluelight, however she is in a position to facilitate further dialogue to help clarify any of the ideas that have been put forward by Bluelight's members in this submission.

#1

23-05-2006 10:30

My Story

I'm a guy in my mid twenties who works as an IT systems engineer in the most isolated city in the world, Perth. I've been taking illicit drugs since the about the end of high school. I smoked weed for a while then when I got a bit older and started going to pubs and clubs I tried MDMA and methamphetamine.

My drug use has probably helped spark my interest in Harm Reduction/Harm Minimisation, when there was very little information on offer I went looking for myself. Being the curious guy I am I had to know exactly what I was getting myself into. My involvement on Bluelight started there and I've been here ever since.

I imagine as I get older my drug use will become more infrequent but I can't see myself going cold turkey anytime soon.

My Suggestions

It would be great if there was as much resources put into harm reduction/harm minimisation and drug awareness as there is into supply reduction and the war on drugs. There is plenty of people out there using drugs who apart from the scare campaigns, which they ignore, have no idea what they are putting into their systems. Bluelight is probably the minority.

It would be fantastic if Reagent pill testing was encouraged from higher up. If more people knew what was in half of the pills they took I'm sure less people would be taking them like candy. Illicit drug production isn't a controlled industry so it is the next best thing to quality control. If the kits were known about and accepted by everybody I'm sure they would be a carry a better message to the Party Drug using collective rather than 'don't use drugs they will ruin your life'. It would be even better if more was spent on pill or drug testing so better, more reliable and accurate testing methods could be widely available. Submitting pills to be lab tested like in America and Europe is a good example.

Tougher supply reduction would not work in my opinion. Cutting the supply will not change the demand for the product. When there is a demand for something there is always going to be someone willing to supply and will find a new way to produce or import. This would probably just drive up the price and increase the likelihood of a contaminated product being supplied to the end user.

#2

23-05-2006 13:20

I am 24 years old, from Sydney, and have been running my own business full time since I was 19. I started smoking marijuana and drinking when I was in high school, around year 9 or 10, but nothing out of the ordinary to normal kids.

I first tried MDMA not long after I turned 21, and speed not long after that. I use occasionally if I'm going to have a "big" night out, usually about 6 - 12 times per year. I do not see illicit drugs having anything but a positive influence on my life. I haven't had a drag on a cigarette since Jan 6 this year. Tobacco and alcohol are the only 2 drugs that have harmed me.

If the government allowed for testing of pills, the risk of adulterated poisons being consumed could greatly drop. Punishing recreational users is not good for anyone.

If I had the power to change the law, I would allow unlimited pill testing and reduce penalties for people caught with "personal use" amounts of recreational drugs.

People who consume drugs recreationally in a safe environment aren't harming anyone.

#3

23-05-2006 14:55

I'm pushing 40, male, working as a drug and alcohol professional in Melbourne.

Alcohol and tobacco were my first drugs of choice as a teenager, but I soon came across amyl nitrite and cannabis. Cannabis smoking has been a regular feature of my life until very recently.

I discovered speed, ecstasy, magic mushrooms, nitrous oxide, cocaine and LSD in my early 20s and have taken them all on an irregular basis ever since.

I have had heroin on a handful of occasions; also DMT.

Overall, illicit drug use has had a positive impact on my life. I've enjoyed a lot of good times and met some great people. Using ecstasy definitely helped me to learn how to dance, and helped me curb my alcohol intake. It might seem frivolous to talk about learning to dance, but it truly is not. Taking ecstasy and/or speed and dancing is the start of a chain of events whereby I have put a lot more effort into my physical health, and improved my overall wellbeing. Stopping heavy binge drinking was a seismic shift in my behaviour that is clearly linked to my use of ecstasy as well, and with undoubted positive health impacts.

Using psychedelic drugs such as LSD, mushrooms and DMT forms part of a general pattern of inquiry and critical thought in my life. These drug experiences have also frequently been simply enjoyable in and of themselves.

Negative impacts of drug use relate to smoking - shortness of breath, persistent coughs. It would be hard to say what is due to tobacco smoking, and what is due to cannabis smoking. My recent decision to stop smoking cannabis is because I find it too difficult to not smoke cigarettes if I still smoke cannabis - not because of any adverse effects from cannabis intoxication.

My drug intake has definitely rolled off as I get older - just a natural consequence of more responsibilities and less time to party. I will probably still take the odd substance if the opportunity arises - maybe only 3-4 times a year, compared to weekly or more in my 20s.

My recommendation for government policy is definitely to frame drug use as a health issue - not a legal one. Personal use of all drugs should not be a crime. Tougher supply control measures are not the answer, and will almost certainly increase the harms associated with drug use. There is no evidence that supply control measures will reduce overall drug related harms.

I would like to see pill testing (and testing for all drugs) promoted, with perhaps some facility for publicly available lab testing as well. This would almost certainly increase the quality and consistency of street drugs, and allow people to make healthier choices about their drug use.

I would also like to see some of the resources that usually go on supply control being diverted into more evidence-based treatment and harm reduction programs, as well as more research on effective health promotion strategies.

#4

23-05-2006 17:34

My Story

I am a 26 year old male, I live in Perth and work in the Community Services Sector. I use MDMA every two to three months and occasionally use other synthetic drugs such as amphetamine, methamphetamine, DMT and LSD. I have been using synthetic drugs since I was 18 although at that point it was more like once a fortnight. I have had both positive and negative experiences as a result of my drug use but generally the pros outweigh the cons and as a result I don't see my drug use changing anytime soon. The main benefit I get through using MDMA is the increased empathy and connection I get with the people around me. I often find that the positive experiences I have whilst on MDMA flow over into my day to day life. Generally I find I am in more control when I use MDMA than when I use alcohol and for me there are less unwanted side effects. The only negative influence I have noticed MDMA has on me is the occasional short period of depression after using it.

In my work I see the consequences of methamphetamine abuse all too often and realise that like alcohol, heroin and other drugs of addiction, methamphetamine has the potential to cause serious problems for some people. It can be more dangerous than other drugs at times as heavy users often have drug induced paranoia coupled with increased energy. To me this is only one end of the spectrum though and for many people (myself included) it is possible to use this drug with limited negative effects.

My Suggestions

Policy Change: Ideally I would like to see regulation of MDMA as has been done with alcohol, tobacco and pharmaceuticals or as a second option decriminalisation of MDMA as is the case with cannabis. Realistically it would be a tall order for either of these things to take place given the current public and

media attitude to this drug. Other options that could be viable are; increased focus on the health issues associated with synthetic drug use, more information from police regarding pill contents and bad batch warnings and legalised pill testing.

With regard to health issues I would like to see specific priority given to treatment options including drug replacements and alternatives as is done for opiate addiction. Recent trials in New Zealand explored the use of Methylone as a safer alternative to MDMA and BZP is being used there as an alternative to methamphetamine. I think Australia could do well to learn from what has happened there. It would also be good to see research done into other pharmacological treatments for methamphetamine addiction. In my opinion use of the leaves of the khat tree (*Catha edulis*) would make an excellent substitute and have been used with minimal health problems in East African and Middle Eastern Countries as a euphoric stimulant. See (Khat (*Catha edulis*)—an updated review NEZAR N. AL-HEBSHI & NILS SKAUG *Addiction Biology* (December 2005) 10, 299 – 307)

Supply Reduction: It seems to me to be an expensive option that is not particularly effective in reducing the negative effect drugs have on the community. Reduction in the quantity of drugs on the market means that higher prices can be obtained for the drugs that are available and the people selling the drugs continue to profit. That is assuming that the market is even affected by supply reduction efforts which at present doesn't seem to be the case. There is also the danger that other more harmful substances could be mixed with the drugs to make them go further or that the drugs could be synthesised using different routes increasing the risk of contamination.

Pill Testing: To me it seems that pill testing is an essential component of harm reduction. Personally I would not use a tablet if it was found to contain substances other than MDMA. Further I would like to decrease the risk to myself and my friends by taking a dose that was high enough to achieve an effect but not so high as to risk overdose. Having access to accurate scientifically proven testing methods would greatly reduce the harm associated with MDMA use in Australia.

#5

24-05-2006 09:59

My Story

I am a 17 year old male living in Brisbane and am a law undergraduate student. I use MDMA every 1 - 2 months and cannabis about once a week. I have been using both these drugs for about a year and a half. I have also experimented with LSD and nitrous oxide but tend to use these on a more irregular basis. I feel that on the whole, drug use has influenced my life very positively. MDMA and LSD in particular have given me different insight and their benefits have definitely been seen in my everyday life. I feel that neither of these drugs have affected me negatively. Cannabis also I have found on the whole to be positive, however I find that it can be unhelpful when studying and I make efforts to reduce my use during study/exam periods. It is for this reason that I also aim to decrease my cannabis use in the future, with the heavy work load law has given me.

My Suggestions

My two main concerns with current policy are the illegal nature of the drugs I use, and regarding MDMA, possible contaminants in "ecstasy" pills.

Being a law student, the ramifications of a criminal record arising from my drug use would be disastrous. Many of my friends are in similar positions and even the thought of a criminal record for drug taking of

the described nature seems overly harsh. In my eyes, criminal punishment of drug use does not achieve anything positive and does not act as a deterrent. Drug use is so wide spread in my age group, people do not listen to government warnings. They are wary of, but still choose to disobey the law, knowing fully the consequences. All my friends, most of whom come from conservative families, use drugs. I therefore in future would like to see the legalization and regulation of such drugs on par with drugs like alcohol and tobacco. However, this is unrealistic and I am a great believer in incremental change. Thus for the mean time, the decriminalisation of synthetic drugs would be a positive move forward.

Contaminants in “ecstasy” pills is also very concerning to me. I use a pill tester every time I use “ecstasy” pills, and find it very useful. Unfortunately, I am the minority. People need to be educated about pill testing, and pill testing should also be available at raves, clubs and other places where MDMA is likely to be consumed. Lab testing should also be made available so people know exactly the dose of the drug. Many overdoses occurred last year on “Red Mitsubishi” “ecstasy” pills. These pills contained only MDMA but at a much higher dosage of the average street pill. Lab testing may well have prevented accidents like these. People are not going to stop using drugs, so we should accept that people will use drugs and make it as safe as possible for them to do so. I therefore strongly support the trialling of pill testing in Australia.

#6

24-05-2006 17:23

My story

I am in my late 20s. I am employed full-time in a professional job. I have drunk alcohol since my late teens, experimented with marijuana in my early 20s and have taken ecstasy very occasionally (probably a total of 15-20 times) since my mid-twenties. I have not used any illegal drug for approximately a year and am uncertain whether I will again, mainly because I have more responsibilities and party less than I once did and also because I am more informed and concerned regarding possible risks.

In my experience, my use of ecstasy has been generally positive, leading to enhanced understanding of, and compassion for, other people. As well as making me feel very, very happy. Assuming that ecstasy has the same effect on others that it does on me, it is very difficult for me to understand characterisations of this drug as “evil”. Marijuana I have never enjoyed as it makes me paranoid and anti-social. Alcohol I have enjoyed but have also experienced problems with, in that it has caused me and others to act in ways that are stupid, unpleasant and dangerous. I have friends who have been seriously injured as a direct result of alcohol fuelled behaviour.

My suggestions

I believe that as long as person is a an informed adult, what they put into their body is their business. If someone’s drug use causes their behaviour to impact upon others, then there is a role for the criminal law, but that is not the case for the vast majority of users of the so-called “party drugs”. The current policy criminalises a large section of the population for engaging in activities which viewed realistically are not particularly dangerous or socially harmful. This does not encourage respect for the law overall. Media coverage of illegal drugs is generally ill-informed if not outright misleading, as are some government scare campaigns. This is counter-productive – people quickly realise that the information is not accurate and may then disregard all warnings.

I also think that the concept of supply reduction is, at least with respect to widely accepted drugs, largely ineffective. Most people can access illegal drugs fairly easily if they wish to. I think that the real key to

addressing harmful drug use is cultural change. Cultures where drug use is more acceptable have higher rates of drug use than those where it is not – compare the United States and Holland for example. Despite the draconian penalties in place in the US, drug use there is higher than it is in Holland, which has relatively lenient penalties.

To summarise, I would suggest that the harms of illegal drug use can be reduced by:

1) Telling the truth about the relative harmfulness of various drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)

2) Reducing the cultural acceptance of drug use, especially alcohol. You will have little chance of convincing people it is wrong to use ecstasy when a substance that is more socially problematic is openly promoted. All alcohol advertising should be banned. Possibly minimum drinking ages should be raised. People should be made aware that alcohol is a dangerous drug. Obviously laws also play a part in determining social acceptance, although I think that the impact of making a substance illegal is greatly overestimated. If use of a substance is acceptable culturally, people will ignore the laws.

3) recognising that some people will still continue to use legal and illegal drugs, and taking steps to reduce the harm that they will suffer (i.e., pill testing, safety information, and not ruining peoples lives with a criminal conviction because they have chosen to use a substance which is not legal)

#7

24-05-2006 20:11

My Story

I am 45 years old, married with 2 children. I work with adults with disabilities. I used cannabis and amphetamines in my 20s but gave them away because they did me more harm than good (same with tobacco). I use alcohol a little, though much less since discovering MDMA (“Ecstasy”).

I have struggled with various ‘mental health issues’ all my life – depression mostly, treated with prescribed pharmaceuticals. I first self-medicated with MDMA in 2004 because I had read (on the ‘Net) that before being used as a party drug, it had been used as a therapeutic agent with what seemed to be miraculous results. The personal accounts are easily available online (search for “MAPS”) and I now have no doubt that the claims made (for MDMA’s therapeutic use) are very real. I am of the view that its real value lies in therapy and healing and that its hedonistic use is frivolous (but then, we all need some frivolity in our lives, right?!).

The difference that MDMA has made to my life is nothing short of phenomenal. I no longer consider suicide to be the most likely cause of my death. I use no other medications (well, OK - a little alcohol). I have a real sense of meaning and purpose in my life.

I use MDMA at home with my wife and I look forward to using it (when I can get it!) with some close friends and some family members. I have great difficulties obtaining MDMA because I’m not in the party scene and I live in the suburbs. I’ve never met anyone like me (but I’d like to!).

My Suggestions

Real MDMA is so, so benign and so not dangerous. Used thoughtfully and responsibly, it has *enormous* potential to bring out the best in each one of us. Even used “irresponsibly” it can confer great benefits. PLEASE, can we give researchers a chance to explore the possibilities?

My story

I was a bit of a nerd at school: I worked hard for my ‘outstanding academic achievement’, but didn’t have the best time when it came to socialising. I continued to achieve at a high standard whilst studying at a university in Perth. Although it looked to everyone else that I had it ‘made’, my fears and anxieties got worse around age 18-19, I was diagnosed with depression and had to defer my classes and get help from a psychologist and through antidepressant drugs.

I first tried speed, closely followed by (ecstasy) pills just after turning 21, the year I returned to uni after getting through the worst of my psychological troubles. I’d rarely gotten drunk by this time and had not been around much marijuana either. I used speed and pills whilst hanging out with friends and at clubs, and found I was able to get through my fear of socialising (and dancing!), and realised for the first time, that I could break down these barriers and enjoy life like everyone else seemed to, whilst still being in control (unlike the effects of alcohol).

I armed myself with as much information as I could about reducing the harms of drug use (mainly through online sources) and I monitored my use to make sure it didn’t get out of hand. As studying and work opportunities increased, I was able to tailor down my drug use to integrate with these more important demands, since I found the lack of sleep and come-down could affect my work/study. However what I needed to learn, I had learnt – I really could be confident with other people – and with the initial help of my psychologist, I maintain that positive understanding of myself to this day (regardless of my drug use).

Nowadays I’m 27, have a promising career, and am mentally well. I still take pills occasionally (once every 3 months or so) because it’s fun, pleasurable and social. Sometimes this is at a nightclub but more often, it’s a house party amongst a close-knit group of friends. I have tried most other drugs and routes of administration out of curiosity, although I’m content with the idea of never trying injecting. I still have a few non-drug-using friends, and they don’t judge my decisions. Most of my friends also use these drugs to varying degrees.

I am concerned about the illegality of drug use, given that I obey the law in other ways, and see what I do as a useful addition to my life. I wish I didn’t have to take a gamble with the content of pills. I own a reagent test kit, and use it when I can, however because I am concerned about the prospect of being caught in possession of drugs, I prefer to let people in my social circle organise supply so the drugs are never stored at my home. This means I can’t always test them and have to rely on the opinions of trusted others. This is not ideal, and is a clear example of how laws and their effects can increase the potential harms for people who use drugs.

My suggestions

I believe that the balance of funding between supply, demand and harm reduction needs drastic change. Discovering more clandestine labs or busting a large quantity of drugs in transit to the Australian market should not be the way success in supply reduction is measured. I don’t think tougher supply reduction laws will reduce drug use. Measures that are effective in reducing supply may well increase harm to drug users. I believe we need to change policies so their effect on the harms of drug use is the main criteria for evaluation.

I know we are in a conservative political climate: ideally I think there is much to be gained by a change in

public attitude from fighting the so-called war on drugs to learning how to live with drugs in a responsible way. We can work towards that slowly, even if it means funding harm reduction projects without drawing much publicity so the public can keep living a myth. But in the end, it's all hypocrisy.

The problem with hypocritical politics is that it filters down to everyone. Our drug education in high-schools is not working precisely because it is hypocritical and teenagers are not stupid. We need to provide factual unbiased information about drugs and their effects in school drug education, as well as equip young people with the skills to make their own responsible decisions. Many will decide to use drugs when the opportunity presents itself; we should enable these young people to do so more safely.

Pill testing is something responsible ecstasy users want. The difference between illicit drug consumption and other consumption (like legal drugs or other products/services) is simply the risk associated with its illegality - there are no legally enforceable product safety standards that illicit drug manufacturers follow. More accurate pill testing technology is available and could be used to identify the content and the strength of pills sold as ecstasy. If drug users know the content, they can make informed decisions about whether to use it and/or when and in what circumstances; if they know the strength, they can adjust their dosage accordingly. These are simple strategies that will undoubtedly reduce harms drug users currently experience, including the rare but occasional death.

Politicians are concerned at the so-called message pill testing might "send" to young yet-to-be drug users. Rather than make assumptions about what young people think, we need more local research to ask them how they would perceive pill testing. Studies conducted in Europe found that non-drug-using youths at raves where pill testing was being conducted were less likely to begin taking drugs during the research period. Pill testing has a deterrent effect in that adulterated drugs are avoided, and people become more aware of impurities present in their pills. However in the end, the presence of pill testing is hardly going to "make someone start taking drugs": what governments do/say is such a small part of why people take drugs. Peers, and then parents, are a lot more influential.

I think above all we need to treat people who use drugs with respect. Many of them are living productive lives whilst trying to protect themselves and their friends from harms that could be avoided. It is true that these risks are avoided by abstinence from illicit drugs. However in a society where intoxicated celebration is quite normal (for example, alcohol) and where illicit drugs with particularly likeable benefits are available - policies must be changed to reflect care and consideration for people who choose to use these drugs. If we amend our drug policy aims to be neutral (like Bluelight, neither condoning nor condemning drug use) as well as respectful, stakeholders from both sides would be better able to communicate with each other. Insights from this communication could go a long way to achieving a meaningful reduction in drug-related harm.

#9

27-05-2006 09:56

My story

I'm a 23 year old male. I went to a decent school, got a degree at uni, got a good job and am now paying tax in the second-highest bracket. I dabbled in cannabis in year 12 at school and in my first few years of uni. I didn't enjoy the experience that much, but I can understand how others do. I never saw it as a dangerous thing from a health standpoint, but the legal aspects of getting caught were a bit of a worry. I tried MDMA a few times at uni and really enjoyed it, but couldn't afford it as I was supporting myself through youth allowance and my income wasn't that high. After graduating and working for a year, I had a bit more money, so after being offered some by a good friend in a safe environment I tried it and really

enjoyed it again.

I do not view MDMA as a dangerous drug. The primary risks are adulterated pills and the legal risks. The first can be minimised by pill testing, the second is a bit of a worry but doesn't stop me – it just means I'm more careful about when and where I take it. I take MDMA about once a month and do believe it has had a positive impact on my life. Aside from the risks mentioned above, I do not believe my MDMA usage places any serious risk on my health. Yes, it can have a detrimental effect on my health if it is used incorrectly, but so can alcohol. I treat my MDMA usage with the same principles that I treat my alcohol usage – in moderation and in the right time at the right place.

My suggestions

I believe MDMA and related drugs should be treated as a health issue, not a legal one. I believe the government has lost a lot of respect in the eyes of young people with the way they have handled it. A large proportion of the population has tried cannabis without harm, and a growing proportion of the population has tried ecstasy without harm. The illegality of these activities makes them more interesting to naturally curious young people, so they talk about it a lot with their peers, and those that have taken them tell stories of how it was a very positive experience, and most of the warnings from government seem like a boy crying wolf. Their friends try the drugs, and the 'boy who cried wolf' story eventuates. Young people pay a lot less attention to the health warnings from government and instead turn to alternative services such as Bluelight, Enlighten Harm Reduction and so on. It should be acknowledged that the 'Ravesafe' service funded by several state governments is an effective way of reaching out to young people, but many of the mainstream campaigns are not.

Increases in policing and other supply-reduction techniques will not reduce the usage of MDMA and related drugs and will only harm the otherwise productive members of society who get caught. In this instance it is clear that the negative health impacts of the drug usage are low, and the positive impacts are high. In summary, I believe this is better dealt with as a health issue, with a focus on harm reduction.

#10

29-05-2006 19:08

My story

I am a 26 year old male who has grown up in and continues to live in Melbourne, I work full time as a software developer in the public service, I have held my current job for four years and have worked professionally in my field for six years. I am degree-qualified and have never been in trouble with the law.

The first illicit drug I used was MDMA, when I was 22. Over the proceeding four years I have been a regular user of the drug, at one point taking it every weekend, though my usage has slowed considerably in the last two years. During that time I also regularly used methamphetamine and ketamine. Less regularly I also used cannabis and cocaine. I am a smoker and do not drink alcohol (I don't really like it).

These days I might have a big night every month or so, it all depends on work and other personal commitments. While I don't envisage that I will ever stop using drugs, naturally they will probably take less of a priority in my life as I accumulate more of the responsibilities of adulthood.

Overall I feel that my use of "party drugs" has been a very positive influence in my life, coming from a background where I was able to succeed academically at school and university and eventually in my career, but still feeling disillusioned with life and isolated, I credit my use of MDMA with helping me to

become a more rounded individual. It has helped me to form better relationships with my peers, workmates and my parents.

I know that it's hard for people in your position to understand but drug use does have benefits or otherwise people wouldn't use them. While those benefits may not be as easily quantifiable as buying a house or a promotion at work, there are benefits related to the personal development of human beings and their personalities, because powerful psychotropic drugs like MDMA can help people achieve insights and understandings they would not otherwise have reached.

For someone who is as naturally conservative as myself, a decision to use these drugs is based on the evaluation (right or wrong) that the perceived benefits outweigh the risks.

That said, I am more than aware of the dangers that come with all drug use. At the peak of my usage, especially with MDMA, I experienced mild early-week depression, sleeping problems and deficiencies with my short term memory. At the moment I have not taken MDMA in almost two months and no longer experience these symptoms.

My suggestions

HARM REDUCTION

Over the course of the last four years I estimate that I have consumed about five hundred ecstasy pills. I tested around 75% of these pills using a test kit and on almost every occasion they tested up as containing mainly MDMA. Only once did I ever have an adverse reaction to using ecstasy.

On that occasion I procured a pill inside a club from a stranger and consumed it without testing. Taking it I found myself feeling dizzy, disoriented and nauseous. Fortunately I had friends around who looked after me until those effects wore off. Later I learnt that the pill I had taken contained ketamine.

I have seen a lot of people get into trouble in similar fashion. Getting ketamine when you are expecting MDMA can be a real surprise and individuals are often not in the best situation (i.e., a dance party) to handle it. The wider availability of pill testing, especially at places where people take these drugs would go a long way to preventing incidents like this in future.

I also frequently use this website (Bluelight) and Pillreports.com to find out about dangerous or bunk pills going around so I know which ones to avoid and warn friends from taking when I'm out. I think it makes sense to support getting more information into the hands of users about the illicit drugs they are taking if you want to prevent some of the most serious harms associated with using these drugs (serious injury or death).

DEMAND REDUCTION

In the 40's and 50's in Australia, 72% of men were smokers. Today that figure is 23%. Not a single person was arrested or jailed to achieve those figures. Through public awareness campaigns that inform the population, with some honesty, about the real consequences of smoking, we have made it a public health issue that an overwhelming majority of people understand. Smoking rates are still dropping and in many social circles, including among young people, there is a growing acceptance that smoking is not cool.

Contrast that situation with the rising usage rates of amphetamines and other synthetic drugs in Australia today. Young people have turned off from government awareness campaigns, certainly none of my friends

who take drugs place much credit in what the government have to say on the issue. Instead they're using websites like this one and consulting other friends to find out about possible dangerous drug interactions, bad pills to avoid and how to minimise harm.

The anti-smoking message works because most people can see with their own eyes the correlation between the health messages and reality; the uncle who died of cancer, the grandfather who now talks out of a tube in his mouth. Most young people who take ecstasy have never heard of someone experiencing "toxic meltdown" from taking a pill, but they have seen people overdose from mixing GHB and alcohol, but where, in the government message are warnings like that? Or the advice that it's okay to call a paramedic when someone passes out, without fear of police prosecution? The sort of knowledge that would certainly have saved the life of Belinda Davey, the girl who died from a GHB overdose in Melbourne last year.

While the media are certainly to blame for much of the scare-mongering in drug education, it's the government that must lead by example. Otherwise it risks losing all credibility with a generation who have unparalleled access to information and a built-in skepticism to authority, who are already using these drugs in massive amounts. Every weekend thousands of young people take these drugs in nightclubs and parties, and as many older people in their twenties and thirties do so in bars and homes.

Why should people listen to government warnings when their own experience has suggested otherwise regarding the real risk of these drugs? Until those messages begin to reflect reality, drug users like myself will continue to tune out. On the other hand, I have set a date in the next couple of weeks to try quitting smoking again.

SUPPLY REDUCTION

"The prestige of government has undoubtedly been lowered considerably by the prohibition law. For nothing is more destructive of respect for the government and the law of the land than passing laws which cannot be enforced. It is an open secret that the dangerous increase of crime in this country is closely connected with this."

- Albert Einstein, "My First Impression of the U.S.A.", 1921

#11

31-05-2006 13:36

My Story

I am a 20 year old male and have been drinking since I was 15. I first smoked weed when I was 17 and Ecstasy when I was 18. I have tried a wide range of other drugs but the one which suited me most was MDMA. Unlike drugs such as alcohol which made me loud, messy and tend to break laws, MDMA I found was far better suited to socialising as it tends to make people "loved up" and friendly. From weekend use of ecstasy of two years I haven't had any negative "trips".

My Suggestions

I believe pill testing is one of the most important parts of harm reduction. With the highest rate of Ecstasy use in the world, it's already shown that people are willing to take the risk with street quality. Giving them an avenue to test for adulterants such as PMA or Ketamine can save lives. The drugs are there, people are taking them blindly anyway, pill testing may stop people taking adulterated pills.

I also think it's very important to have an amnesty for people calling medical help in the event of overdose. Fear can bring out the worst in people and fear of being arrested on drug charges can result in the death of a user. People are scared to dial 000 when their friends are having problems but if there isn't the risk of legal action they might seek medical advice before it's too late.

#12

02-06-2006 12:00

My story

I'm a 25 year old female who has lived in the south western suburbs of Sydney my whole life. I currently work part time and study full time. I will complete my social science degree at the end of this year with a distinction average and hope to work in the humanitarian sector when finished.

I first used MDMA at the age of 20 after seeing close friends and cousins using without any problems. I had a bad experience on my 3rd try, which I now put down to a very strong MDMA pill – unlike the first two which were probably just amphetamines. After that, it was another year before I started using more regularly. For the first year or so, I'd mainly use MDMA or amphetamines, usually in combination with alcohol.

At 22, I started to get curious about what these substances were actually doing and did some internet research, stumbling onto Pill Reports and Bluelight. Over the last few years, I've experimented with other substances, mostly hallucinogens such as LSD. I generally use in a small group party situation, or at clubs or events (though this happens less so, the older I get). I also use codeine recreationally on my own every couple of months. I've had some periods where I've partied quite hard, using almost every weekend for a month or so at a time, but that has also died down over the last year. I don't use any substances during university semesters (including alcohol), mostly due to needing the weekends to complete assignments. I go out every few weeks during the holidays, normally rotating between MDMA, methamphetamines, LSD and alcohol.

For the most part, my drug use has had quite a positive experience on my life. I've met a lot of new friends through the scene and it's brought existing friendships closer. I also feel that it has given me a stronger insight into who I am, my ideals, my strengths and weaknesses. But the central thing is, it feels good and it's a whole lot of fun. I've certainly had periods where I've had bad comedowns, but the more I've learnt about myself and the substances I use, the better I'm able to manage this. I've never experienced any negative impact to my work or education.

At this stage, I don't see myself stopping any time soon. I'm sure that there will come a time when other responsibilities mean that drug use is not high on the list of priorities, but at this point, I don't see any reason why I won't continue to use, albeit infrequently, for some years to come.

My suggestions

Firstly, I think that there must be acknowledgement that the urge to imbibe is *never* going to go away. History shows that this is something innate to human beings (and indeed, some animals too!). History also has strong lessons with regard to efforts to prohibit humans from indulging in their substance of choice. Much of the harm done by drugs comes as a result of their illegal status. Inflated prices result in the large amounts of crime committed by the relatively small sector of drug users who fall into the problem user category. For those who use recreationally, it is unlikely they will come into contact with the criminal justice system for any reason other than having the unlucky experience of being caught out with drugs in

their possession. Apart from this, these users are most likely to experience harm due to ingesting adulterated substances, or mixing combinations which they are uneducated about (i.e., GHB + Alcohol).

Tougher supply reduction measures do not work. There are a million and one ways to get high. As long as demand exists, people will find a way around restrictions. A reduction in supply of one drug (i.e. heroin in Australia) can lead to massive increases in use of other substances such as methamphetamines or cocaine. If tougher laws do manage to have an impact on supply, this must be analysed in combination with the following effects (just to name a few):

- Inflated prices, which may trigger crime and may also trigger more risky methods of administration of substances, such as injecting, to get ‘more bang for your buck’
- Increases in the number of adulterated substances (particularly pills being sold as MDMA) due to manufacturers not being able to access required ingredients
- A switch to more readily accessible substances, such as prescription drugs

I would love to see wide-spread pill testing within Australia. Although I own a pill tester, I do not test all my pills... much of my drug use tends to be spur of the moment these days and it's not feasible to carry as tester every time I go out. I would like to see pill testing available at events and club nights. I also believe that lab testing and the publication of these results in a timely manner is essential. Research on pill testing overseas has shown that many users, when confronted with a test which indicates an adulterated pill, would not take the pill. I think that at the very least, similar research should be undertaken in the Australian context.

One of the other areas which I have a major concern with is the use of drug detection dogs on public transport and at events. I firmly believe that people should be discouraged from driving under the influence of drugs, however, the use of dogs on public transport may serve as a deterrent for people choosing the safest way to travel to and from events. I also believe that the use of dogs at events can encourage unsafe practices such as consuming all substances before entering an event in order not to be detected.

For those that do fall into the problem user category and have come into contact with the criminal justice system, I believe there should be an expansion of the drug court program. I spent some time observing and researching the court as part of one of my university subjects and whilst it is not a perfect program, I think that diversion of non-violent offenders into treatment programs rather than into prison is of much benefit to the user and to the community. I'm aware that the completion rate for the program is not all that high (just over 55% in a 2002 report), but for those who do comply, the rate of re-offending appears to be significantly lower. Perhaps more research needs to be done into those who will best benefit from the programs and ways in which the program can be tailored differently for each individual.

Most drug users are not unintelligent. This is a generation which is already skeptical of the government's ability to provide unbiased information. Scare campaigns simply do not work and do not strike a chord with the experience of the average drug user. It would be great to live in a country which takes a progressive stance on this issue, instead of continuing to bury its head in the sand.

My say

I'm a 29 year old male, currently working part-time at a Melbourne university, as well as undertaking a Masters part-time. I did not use any drugs (including caffeine, nicotine, and for the most part, alcohol) until after I completed high school. During my time as an undergraduate I experimented with marijuana, LSD and ecstasy. I saw this as part of the process of growing into adulthood, and experimenting with the breadth of experiences that life has to offer. At the same time I was opened up to many different ways of understanding the world through my university studies, and I partook in other forms of experimentation: sexual, social, artistic.

I have continued to experiment with drugs, and have tried most commonly available illicit drugs, with the exception of heroin. Of all the drugs I have used, there is no doubt that cigarettes have posed the most danger and been the most destructive in my life. I have managed to give up smoking, thank goodness, but I continue to use alcohol, marijuana and ecstasy in moderation, and occasionally other drugs if the opportunity arises. On average I would now consume ecstasy once every two to three months, and see it as a drug to be used for special occasions which call for social gatherings amongst my friendship group, such as birthdays, New Year's Eve, and the like. I don't think that drugs have ever controlled my life, although nicotine certainly exerted a considerable power over me while I was a smoker.

For me, drug use has formed part of a wider project of exploring possibilities, my own limits, and the nature of friendship, love, pleasure and suffering. I know that I am not alone in having gone through this process. Furthermore, I do not see this behaviour as departing greatly from the previous generation, for many of whom this stage of life offered similar opportunities and freedoms – a fact which is often overlooked by those who seek to demonise young people and their use of drugs. While it should be noted that illicit drug use has become much more widespread, I would argue that one of the only key qualitative differences between generations is the emergent popularity of ecstasy / MDMA.

I maintain that MDMA is a drug with the ability to offer insights, feelings of empathy, and social bonding experiences which can and do benefit the lives of many Australians. I think the potential benefits of this drug have been given sufficient attention by the previous respondents, especially concerning the positive results it may be able to offer in therapeutic scenarios. However, I would like to consider the dangers of using ecstasy, and how these are exacerbated by current Australian drug policy, by the current political climate, by the statements of certain people in positions of power, and through media representations.

Perhaps the greatest danger posed by the use of ecstasy in the current climate is the possibility of adulterated pills, i.e. when other substances are passed off as 'ecstasy', such as PMA, ketamine, amphetamines, etc. PMA especially is a very dangerous substance, however the risk posed by this and other drugs when present in pills which are sold as 'ecstasy' can be greatly reduced through the use of pill testing. At its most basic, this can take the form of reagent testing through the use of testing kits made available to the public by groups such as Enlighten. Having worked as a volunteer for Enlighten myself, I have seen first-hand the influence that pill testing can exert on people's drug-taking decisions. Research shows that people are much less likely to take a pill if it does not appear to contain the substance they were expecting, or if testing produces no conclusive result (which leaves the contents of the pill open to question). Granted, reagent testing is not an 'exact science', and has its limitations and drawbacks. However, I believe that the information it can provide is better than nothing. If this information is coupled with information gleaned from online sources such as Pillreports.com and Bluelight, then this may be better still. However, it still falls well short of an ideal scenario in terms of harm reduction. Something I would like to see given serious consideration is the trialling of laboratory testing of pills made available to

the public, who would be able to anonymously submit pills for testing, and then find out the content and purity of the pill via a website. Politicians, policy makers and police should be mindful of the far-reaching effects that such a measure could have on the drug market in this country, if the trial proved successful and lab testing became commonplace. I believe that this could result in a marketplace which is 'indirectly' regulated, one in which the quality of pills would increase, and the risks associated with dangerous adulterants decrease, provided the public were educated about using such a system as a harm reduction measure.

And education regarding harm reduction remains the key to the whole debate surrounding illicit drug use. The public need to have access to useful and reliable information in order to educate themselves, or their friends, or their children, regarding the risks and harms associated with drug use, and how best to attenuate such risks and harms. We have to accept that drug use does occur, and will continue to occur. We have to accept that if we are to work in the interests of society, and in the interests of saving and improving lives, then a large part of our efforts should be directed towards reducing the harms caused by drugs, by encouraging safer practices, and by encouraging drug users to become better educated about the substances they consume.

Government, law enforcement and the popular media need to emphatically acknowledge and productively support the positive consequences of harm reduction, both as a message and as a practice. The outmoded zero tolerance, 'just say no' approach continues to make no significant inroads to solving the problems caused by illicit drug use, but rather creates its own problems and exacerbates those which it claims to abate. This holds true whether illicit drug use is viewed from a health, criminal, or ethical perspective. Many would argue that the only purpose the current approach serves is political, and for the most part I would agree with this standpoint. Of the stakeholders in this debate, drug users, young people, and practically anyone involved with these groups in a professional capacity, from paramedics to researchers, can see through the political agenda, and their collective voice of opposition gathers strength by the day. It is time for the government to fulfill its leadership role, and alter its stance on illicit drugs. It is time to look at progressive solutions to the problems we face, as a society where drugs are an inescapable reality. It is time to look at what the research tells us, and make policy decisions on the basis of scientific evidence. It is time to listen to the people who know what they are talking about on this issue, and put faith in their expertise and experience, rather than pandering to those who are afraid to look any deeper into it, for fear of challenging the status quo.

#14

06-06-2006 20:29

I'm a 19 year old male, currently studying a Bachelor of Science at a Melbourne university.

I have used drugs from the age of 13-14, beginning with alcohol and cigarettes, then trying marijuana at the age of 15. I smoked marijuana throughout high school on a fairly regular basis. Sometimes too regularly, but I still did fairly well at school. A vast majority of the kids that weren't smoking were drinking on the weekends from about Year 9 onwards. I also tried magic mushrooms, ecstasy, speed, LSD and ketamine before finishing Year 12. During school I managed to stumble across the websites pillreports.com, bluelight.ru and erowid.org. These resources were invaluable for my personal education about effects of different drugs, dosage, quality control (best available) and other issues related to taking substances. I'd like to point out that this information was 1000 times more useful than any information I was given during high school in any health classes or by any teacher. All of the information given in high school was regarding the negatives arising from the extremes of drug use, or use without prior information. Only the negative effects were discussed and seemed to be very out of context to my personal experience. Young people are curious, people forget that. They don't accept everything that older people

say. In some ways curiosity and the need to figure things out for oneself is a good thing.

Upon completing Year 12 I deferred for a year prior to commencing study at university. During this year I experimented with drugs even more and used ecstasy and marijuana fairly regularly.

When I commenced university I cut back on drug intake substantially, but do still use ecstasy and marijuana when I can realistically afford to, due to study commitments and other responsibilities. This may be roughly once a month or once every two months.

I think responsible drug use can be beneficial to anyone, but unfortunately there is a large lack in education about what is responsible use (if there is such a thing), how to minimise harm, what realistic dangers are present, dosage, and a whole host of other things associated with the current government drug policy. Defining precisely the benefits that arise from the use of drugs is difficult, but this is not dissimilar to alcohol. For me, some of the benefits are as follows. The fun and the social aspect (increased ability to socialise and be accepting of other people however they differ). An escape from the money and status driven society that we have created for ourselves (figuratively speaking it's an opportunity to let my hair down). I can avoid the violence and stupidity that goes along with the alcohol drinking culture. The ability to gain deeper insight and understanding into a wide variety of things be it social or philosophical etc... which I believe is induced by altered states of consciousness and thought pattern (more related to psychedelic use). There are other various benefits also, including medicinal use.

Obviously there is a down side to any drug use. In my case I believe that the ups far outweigh the downs, but the downs do exist all the same. This is not unlike alcohol, where too many drinks will cause a headache the next day and everyone knows that ethanol kills brain cells. There are health risks associated with drugs, but I believe these risks can be minimised with proper education and facilities available. Increasing the amount of police assigned to busting drug manufacturers or any of the other latest 'war on drugs' like policies will do nothing to stop people using drugs. There is so much evidence to support this claim from the last 100 years and further back, that it can't be realistically refuted. Anyone who thinks that getting tougher on drugs will cause use to cease eventually, is ignoring the facts. Drugs have been used for thousands of years, and they will continue to be used. In my opinion the numbers of people who try drugs, is increasing and I'm sure this is also supported by the data.

I believe effective strategy is needed to ensure that no more junkies end up on the streets, no more ravers burn out their receptors after 5 years of use, and no more kids die from using drugs. I believe this can be achieved with a culture of education, rather than prohibition. I understand that for a politician to support legalisation is ludicrous so I won't ask for that, but harm reduction is the next best thing. Pill testing, spreading information, proper unbiased research into harm associated with a range of use levels of a range of drugs, injecting rooms. There are so many things that the government could be doing with their millions of dollars, rather than throwing it down the toilet on advertising, which achieves nothing. Teenagers and young adults sit back and look at the television while they are smoking a joint and laugh when those advertisements come on. You are demonstrating the effects of drugs on an absolute minority, 95% of people can see this and realise that it's far removed from their own situation.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to have a say and give some of my opinions. People's lives have been damaged due to drug use, but this is the case for alcohol or any other legal substance which is damaging also. Only a minority of users experience gross negative outcomes, and these could be further reduced by effective health schemes rather than trying to cut supply by spending more money on prohibition. Drugs can be and are beneficial if used in the right context, with the right attitude, and the right information.

My Story

I'm a 19 year old male in Brisbane. I am a third year Software Engineer at a Brisbane university.

During school I began to experiment with alcohol at age 14. My friend had some very awesome parents who supervised us and let us drink at their place when we were about 15, and we quickly taught ourselves why people shouldn't binge drink. Taking the mystery out of alcohol has led to me having maybe 2 or 3 standard drinks every 6 months now.

Shortly after I started drinking, I had a few friends who introduced me to marijuana. The only thing I had heard about it was the typical things like it will give you various mental disorders, etc, from my school and my parents. This made me even more curious (why would people take it then?) and led me to trying it at a friend's place a few times, though not many before the end of school. My friends were smoking it every day and had enough money to sustain the habit.

When I left school and had more money I started to have marijuana more. When I went to university and college, my marijuana use peaked until I realised how much it was affecting my study and life in general. I still enjoy marijuana, but only when I do not have any Uni/work related commitments (long uni holidays).

At the end of my first year of university I was introduced to "ecstasy". The first "ecstasy" I ever bought was actually ketamine, and I associated the effects of ketamine with MDMA and so I was turned off it for a while. It wasn't until I told my experience to a more experienced user that what I had didn't sound like MDMA. It was about this time that I learnt about Erowid.

Reading Erowid made me curious about LSD, as I had been offered it before. A few friends and I all obtained some, and set a date in the holidays when a house would be empty to take it with a trip-sitter. That was one of the best experiences I've ever had in my life. Not something I could do more than once or twice a year, and I don't think I'll be having it for much longer.

At the beginning of my second year I decided to try ecstasy. This time I had proper MDMA, and it was one of the best nights of my life. Nothing can prepare you for the first time. Since then, I've had it at 13-15 events over 2 years and have had a wonderful experience every time. I know the risks, I know the consequences, but these are some of the best times I've ever had with close friends and complete strangers. It's completely worth it and MDMA is the only drug I would encourage someone to try.

Will I keep taking drugs? Yes, in the short term. Drugs have always been recreational for me, and not a lifestyle. In the long term I see myself occasionally having MDMA or cannabis. When I join the "working world" I don't see myself having drugs as a major part of my life.

In addition to those above, I also have also tried methamphetamine and tobacco, and did not like either of them.

My Suggestions

I would like to see drugs controlled in a different way. I can't say I think drugs should be legalised, but the laws do need to change. There are many people out there who will abuse anything they are given (especially alcohol). Decriminalising seems reasonable to me.

The ideal situation for MDMA in my mind is to have it produced and controlled. A major harm risk at the moment is people uneducated about “ecstasy”. If MDMA was produced and regulated, then there would be no market for criminals to control. Having it regulated would mean that I always know exactly what I’m having. I would like to be able to go to my GP, have him tell me the risks associated with what I’m going to take, and then be able to obtain a controlled amount of MDMA (or MDxx combos) for recreational use. [*MDxx refers to MDMA and its derivatives, such as MDA and MDEA*]

Of course this is a farfetched idea with current political and social views. Views can change though! I think it is important to look at issues with a non-biased view on a clean slate.

In regards to tougher supply laws, it doesn’t work. People will always take drugs, and that is a fact of life. It’s time to start thinking “People are going to take drugs no matter what the laws are. How can we best educate them to reduce harm?”. If tougher laws were introduced, it may discourage some, but most people won’t be phased because it isn’t real until they are the ones caught. There is a large criminal force driving the drug trade, and by nature criminals don’t take the law that seriously.

I see no reason to stop pill testing in Australia. It is a very effective form of harm reduction. I have been to one event where pill testing was available, but I was afraid of legal consequences so I didn’t get it done. We only have to look to Europe to see how effective pill testing can be.

In general, I think that Australia is behind the rest of the world when it comes to effective drug laws and harm reduction. People need to accept ideas that people are taking drugs, and that they are working. They also need to accept that the current drug policy and the direction it is going isn’t working.

#16

08-06-2006 05:30

My story

I’m 25, a woman, not working right now, possibly enrolling for the second semester at TAFE, in Adelaide. I have worked in retail, office administration and telecommunications, childcare and studied music and community services.

I started taking LSD at 14. I mainly smoked and drank and took benzos [*benzodiazepines*]. At 15, weed was a daily habit, I’d take acid [*LSD*] and speed sporadically. At times weekly, sometimes once a month, other times not for a couple of months. When I was 16, I started taking meth [*methamphetamine*] about once a week or fortnight. Sometimes more frequently. I took a bit of heroin, know a lot of people’s lives it destroyed and killed. I started smoking a lot of shabu [*crystal methamphetamine*] when I was 19, that ended up being daily, I had to stop taking it, because of the damage it was doing to my health. I started having drug-induced psychosis. I took some ecstasy and coke, but when I was 20 I started taking ecstasy/meth every weekend for a while. I have also had way too much nos [*nitrous oxide*] and GHB. I saw a lot of people “g out” [*overdose*] I also “g’d out” a few times, it can be very dangerous. I have tried ketamine twice. I am still addicted to smoking marijuana. Fortunately I was able to stop taking so many illegal drugs. Unfortunately, I am now on prescription drugs (Xanax and Luvox) for anxiety and depression.

There is a history of drug use in my family. I also think I was self-medicating. Although it was self destructive, it was also a lot of fun. It has had both positive and negative effects on my life. My drug use has definitely killed a lot of brain cells but everything can be restored. I am working on staying fit and healthy.

I've seen numerous counsellors, among other things to heal or help me cope with my pain. I am currently seeing a psychologist who specialises in CBT [*cognitive behaviour therapy*]. This I am finding helpful. It's a lot of hard work to change old habits.

I'm not sure about my drug use in the future but I'm definitely taking a lot less.

Federal level policies I would change to reduce the harms of these drugs

1. Wage equality
2. Improving the education system
3. More incentives and opportunities, appropriate for individuals
4. Improving the health system / mental health / drug awareness
5. Legalise marijuana and make tobacco illegal

I don't know! Where's the justice in a corrupt governing system? The whole legal system is messed up!

Do you think tougher supply reduction laws will reduce drug use?

I think tougher laws might help. In the case of heroin especially.

Maybe not in the case of other illicit drugs. Maybe other laws and policies are what need to be changed.

If not, what effects would tougher laws have?

The less availability, the higher the price. That means the price will go up and crime will increase.

Criminals convicted of drug felonies should get the right treatment, not just get thrown in jail for a while.

It may cause more alienation towards drug users/dealers. What about people who rip off society? What about the murderers and slave traders? Yes I'm talking about the Government!

Where does the real focus need to be, when you look at the bigger picture. Globalisation, starvation, wars, I mean why do people abuse drugs?

Do you think pill testing should be trialled in Australia?

Yes, because I think people are going to take drugs no matter what the laws are, so it is important to know what people are putting into these drugs so it's safer.

I mean if drug addicts/dealers and doctors/authorities/politicians etc. could take away the wall of who's right and wrong, and could have some understanding about the relation between psychological struggles and drug use/crime/rebellion, that would be a step in the right direction. The social environment will directly result in having a major impact on the behaviour choices a person makes.

The Government is a joke. Humanity is suffering. I'd rather ecstasy than a nuclear reactors. Why do we still have troops in Iraq? The world is run by power and greed.

Other comments on amphetamine and other synthetic drug policies in Australia.

Money should be put into the health system treating addicts effectively. For example, early intervention schemes, awareness and education, and holistic healing.

My Story

I am a 21 year old male, living in Melbourne, who is currently completing a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree. My drug use started at around 14 years of age, when I first smoked marijuana. I had always been vehemently opposed to drug use of any sort, thanks to all the anti-drug propaganda that I witnessed during my formative years, that is until I saw some friends smoking marijuana. When they didn't go crazy instantly, my brain clicked and straight away I wanted to try it. I independently looked up information on marijuana and after discovering that the risks were minimal if it was smoked at a low frequency, I decided to smoke it about once a month, and have done so up until this day with no problems. I started drinking alcohol at 15 and continued to drink once a fortnight or so until I was 20.

I first tried MDMA when I was 20 years old and it completely blew me away. Without going into details, I can say with 100% confidence that it brought about a profound personal change in my life, and turned me into a happier, more successful and more productive person. It also caused me to reevaluate my alcohol intake, and it is now substantially lower than it was before I took ecstasy – It is more than likely that taking ecstasy led to long term health benefits in my case. The biggest negative to my whole ecstasy experience is that I had to break the law in order to experience ecstasy – if I had not done something illegal (with the risk of severe penalties!), I would not be in the wonderful personal position that I am today. I use ecstasy very occasionally, and will likely continue to do so for many years, although I do not believe I will use other substances in the future.

In my perfect world, all drugs (synthetic and otherwise) would be regulated by government bodies and available to those who wanted to take them, along with thorough, unbiased information directed at the user. Hand in hand, there would be greater public awareness of the effects of drugs and more support for problem drug users and their families. This would prevent damage caused by impure substances, educate users who would otherwise be unaware of safe procedures for taking drugs, save billions in law enforcement, stop criminals from reaping the profits due to the legal status of these substances, and bring a whole host of other benefits to the wider community.

I am realistic, however, and I do realise that in the current political climate this would be suicide. Despite the fact that all the evidence in the world exists that the war on drugs is an ineffective waste of money, time and energy, it proceeds with a large amount of public support. The problem in this case is that the public is largely unaware of many of the true problems with drugs, and how many of these problems are actually caused by their legal status (drug related crime, impurities, etc). This lack of knowledge is perpetuated by the government and the media, who generally fail to admit any problems with current drug policy despite many of its obvious shortcomings.

Therefore, realistically, I would like to see more accurate information regarding drugs coming from the government. Even with my vested interest in drug laws (and drugs in general, considering my career path), I am distinctly unclear on how drug laws in this country are made – they seem to be decided based on media hype, scare tactics, false claims and vague attempts to be 'tough on drugs'. Very rarely have I seen any drug law passed based on an unbiased analysis of its pros and cons and likely social impact.

I believe that if more impartial information regarding the medical, social and criminal aspects of drug use were made available, then public perception would start to shift, leading to more fair and effective drug laws.