

## September 2017

### **Australian Government's Welfare Reform Bill**

There has been a lot of public concern regarding the Australian Government's new welfare reform measures in relation to the trial of drug testing of welfare recipients. This includes referral to treatment as part of a reformed welfare arrangement for people whose drug use may impede their ability to meet their mutual obligations for receipt of NewStart and other benefits. NADA has made some public comments about the efficacy of mandated drug treatment in relation to this welfare system trial in the three sites nationally, including the NSW trial site in Canterbury-Bankstown. Whilst it is still unclear if the Bill will pass, NADA does not lend its support towards this initiative.

NADA has raised concerns with the relevant Minister's Office as well as senior Department of Social Services staff about the usefulness of drug testing to identify people with a drug dependency, and the need for qualified personnel to conduct alcohol and other drugs (AOD) assessments for people identified under the drug testing regime in the trial. We are also concerned about the trial not having any formal mechanism for people to self-identify prior to the random drug testing, and the time space between the proposed first and second drug tests before any formal assistance or assessment of their needs is conducted. NADA has particularly raised the issue of the lack of capacity in the community based AOD treatment system to take on extra clients from the trial without additional financial resources to support increasing numbers of clients in our member's services.

Should the Bill proceed, we are pleased to see that the government will commit an additional ten million dollars to support timely access to appropriate AOD treatment facilities. They have also committed one million dollars to a two-year evaluation which we would hope would provide clear evidence on whether there is any efficacy to such an approach. There are many questions to be addressed before any proposed trial of this nature commences, and we urge the establishment of broader consultation mechanisms to take place with the relevant sectors.

**Member's views:** We would like to hear from members about their concerns with this initiative. NADA would be happy to pass on feedback to the government and senior DSS staff. Write to: [feedback@nada.org.au](mailto:feedback@nada.org.au)

### **New NSW Cross Agency Alcohol and Other Drugs Forum**

The NSW Ministry for Health is about to establish a forum to support the National Drug Strategy Committee (NDSC) and the Ministerial Drug and Alcohol Forum (MDAF). This new proposed forum will comprise NSW health, human services and justice agencies and the non government sector, and will provide strategic and coordinated high level advice to both the NDSC and the MDAF.

It is envisaged that the NSW forum will:

- Be a mechanism to enable effective NSW government cross agency and NGO consultation on national and NSW AOD policy and program matters;
- Provide a context to identify NSW priorities and enable engagement and collaboration opportunities; and
- Keep both government cross agencies and the NGO sector abreast of policy and program developments across these large and complex sectors state-wide.

It is proposed that NADA will be one of the key NGO representatives on this new forum and we applaud the NSW Ministry for this initiative. We will keep members updated as this new forum is established and seek your feedback on key issues impacting on your services.

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