

Lesson should be learnt—reduced drug use equals reduced crime

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has welcomed recent reports showing a reduction in crime across Australia as a consequence of reduced drug use.

According to Major Brian Watters, Chair of the ANCD, “What has happened in Australia over the last ten years clearly demonstrates the very real benefits of reducing the number of dependent drug users. We have known for some time that increased investment in drug treatment and prevention programs is one of the best ways to reduce crime. We are not surprised given that this is exactly what has happened in Australia over the last ten years.”

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research have revealed a strong correlation between a reduction in the supply of heroin, an increase in the number of heroin users seeking treatment, and a significant reduction in crime, particularly burglary, theft, and break and enter.

Major Watters suggested that the debate about community safety should focus more on the real causes of crime in Australia. “All too often public debates about law and order talk about increasing penalties and building new prisons. What we should actually be talking about is reducing the number of drug dependent people in our community and getting more people into drug treatment.”

Major Watters points out that even the most expensive and intensive drug treatment programs cost around half of the cost of a prison bed and international research shows that for every \$1 invested in treatment the community benefits by around \$7.

“In Australia, the Federal Government and some State & Territory Governments have invested greatly in drug treatment and prevention programs and it has made a real difference. We should build on this experience and increase our capacity to make treatment more accessible and to attract and retain people in drug treatment programs across Australia. It is a great investment and a very good crime prevention program. Clearly all Governments need to increase their financial commitment to drug treatment.”

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The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.

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