



Brief for Councillors

Dear Councillor for the City of Yarra

Drug Free Australia is concerned about false information being used by the Yarra Drug and Health Forum in their lobbying efforts for a Melbourne injecting room based in your local Council. To that end we have written this brief for Yarra City Councillors and Victorian Parliamentarians, providing responses to various assertions in a Powerpoint presentation produced by YDHF. We trust that this will add more light to the debate.

1. YDHF asserts: “Despite legal reviews suggesting that the establishment of SIFs *do not* contravene international obligations under various UN Conventions on drugs”

Drug Free Australia’s response:

- The International Narcotics Control Board, whose role is to interpret the international Conventions against illicit drugs which have been in place since 1912, reiterated its condemnation of injection rooms in its 2009 country report on Canada, saying that “they violated international drug control treaties.” (2009 INCSR: Country Reports - 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR))

2. YDHF asserts: “Evaluations of SIFs world-wide show that there is no increase in drug dealing, drug-related crime and rates of new injecting drug when a SIF is established in a community.”

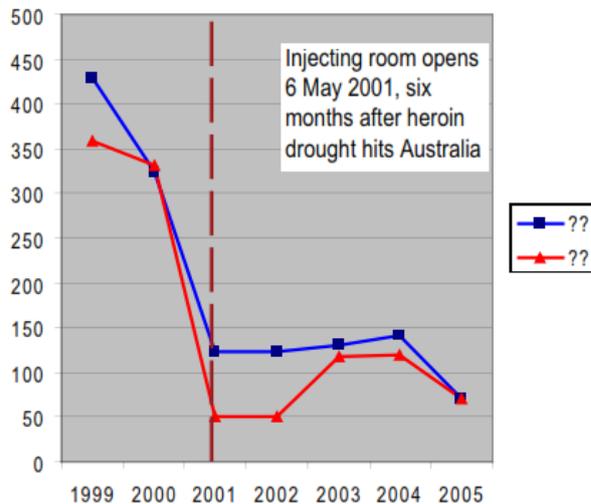
Drug Free Australia’s response:

- An international review of injecting rooms asserts, “There have been relatively few rigorous evaluations of DCRs (Drug Consumption Rooms), with evidence reviews relying primarily on analyses of descriptive data, cross-sectional survey data, and ecological indicators from a larger number of less sophisticated studies. This is especially the case in Europe, where DCRs emerged as a local service response with questions of evaluation arising subsequently. However, the Sydney and Vancouver facilities were established as scientific pilot studies, and thus incorporated more rigorous research designs.” (EMCDDA Monograph 10, 2010 p 308)
- Focusing, therefore, on the Sydney injecting room’s evaluations, “With a few minor exceptions the incidence of robbery and property offences have fallen in the Kings Cross Local Area Command since 2001. **This pattern is consistent with the rest of Sydney.**” (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) Issue Paper No. 51 August 2010) Note that Kings Cross

decreased in line with all other postcodes in Sydney after the heroin drought intervened in October 2000. (The heroin drought continues today). The heroin drought reduced heroin use and deaths

across all Australia by 65% since 2000, reducing drug dealing and drug-related crime throughout.

Heroin deaths - which State has the injecting room?



The graph (left) shows heroin deaths for NSW (blue) and Victoria (red) post-drought. **The heroin drought was responsible for reductions in crime and dealing, not the injecting room.**

- Sniffer dog policing, introduced 12 months after the injecting room opened, was further responsible for moving dealers and users away from the Kings Cross postcode and the injecting room environs to Darlinghurst, the suburb next door.
- Focusing on the Canada's injecting room: Re reductions in crime and dealing around Vancouver's Insite (opened Sept 2003), Canada's only injecting room, the area's operational commander of police John McKay said:

"Yes, four officers per day, 22 hours per day, 7 days per week, for one year from Sept 03 - Sep 04 in the block at all times with cell phone access directly to them by SIS staff. These officers were paid on overtime callout at double time for that whole year. The Vancouver agreement paid for that. At the same time 60 other officers were deployed in a 5-block area and still are to this day. The police took care of public disorder. The SIS enhanced public disorder." (Mangham C. A Critique of Canada's INSITE Injection Site and its Parent Philosophy JGDPP Vol 1, Issue 2 - 2007) Zero-tolerance policing around Insite from 2003 to the present has reduced drug dealing and drug-related crime in the area, not the injecting room

3. YDHF asserts: The National Drug Household Survey 2010 reported that the majority of Australians support the introduction of SIFs.

Drug Free Australia's response:

- 51.5% of Australians now support injecting rooms, but much of its positive publicity has demonstrably been based on misinformation. Take these media examples:

- “Careful not to promote the centre at this stage as anything other than a solution to a local problem (ie. preventing fatal drug overdoses in Kings Cross), Dr Van Beek presented compelling evidence that in its first nine months, the centre has **SAVED MORE THAN 100 LIVES.**”
http://www.hepatitisc.org.au/resources/documents/36_01.pdf (February 2002)
- “A final report on the controversial Kings Cross injecting centre is expected to declare it a resounding success that has **SAVED HUNDREDS OF LIVES.**” Sun Herald 15/6/2003
- The reality, which the injecting room promoters well knew, is that “Darke et al. (in press) reported an estimate of 4.1% fatal overdoses for every 100 non-fatal overdoses in the community overall.” (MSIC 2003 Government-funded Evaluation p 59) Injecting room promoters (such as its first Medical Director) cannot say they didn’t know that most overdoses aren’t fatal - 44% of their clients recorded non-fatal overdoses on their intake questionnaires, (av. 3 per client). Yet the injecting room inexcusably painted a picture for the public where all overdoses are fatal and every intervention in the room a life saved. Drug Free Australia can give numerous examples of similar misinformation by the injecting room’s promoters.

4. YDHF asserts: MSIC Sydney has improved public amenity (cleaner streets and laneways) by reducing discarding of needles and syringes in public places.

Drug Free Australia’s response:

- The heroin drought which commenced in late 2000 reduced heroin user numbers and heroin deaths throughout Australia by 60-70%, reductions which have continued over the ten years since it commenced. Central to any discussion of improved public amenity due to reduced numbers of discarded needles in Kings Cross should be the effect of the heroin drought.” (Drug Free Australia Analysis of KPMG Evaluation p 19)
- “Discarded needles on the street were counted and recorded in the year 2000, before the injecting room opened, and again in 2002, 14 months after it opened. The streets closest to the injecting room particularly failed to keep pace with reduced distributions of needles (down by 19%) due to the drought. Darlinghurst Road, upon which the injecting room fronts, had 10% decreases in Council counts, while Bayswater Road, 50 metres around the corner from the facility, had 65% increases and Kellett Street, at the back door of the facility, had 24% increases. Two of the other hotspots further from the injecting room had significant decreases, though, of 40 – 60%.” (Christian G. Blinded by the Dominant Ideology Quadrant November 2010 Volume LIV No 11) DFA notes the movement of discarded needles into the immediate proximity of the injecting room in these statistics.
- “The (2010) KPMG evaluation of the MSIC, in reviewing the various data on discarded needles and associated public injecting, appears intent on keeping both the heroin drought and tougher law enforcement a well-kept secret, with no mention of either in its discussion pages regarding improved public amenity. (Drug Free Australia Analysis of KPMG Evaluation p 19)

5. YDHF asserts: MSIC Sydney has played an important role to play in providing access to treatment for illicit drug users as well as access to other important health and social welfare programs that support both them and their children.

Drug Free Australia's response:

- The KPMG 2010 evaluation reports 3,871 referrals to drug treatment or counseling without indicating the very low percentage of clients receiving those multiple referrals. In 2003 and 2007 the percentage was just 11% of clients, which in light of known motivations of drug users to quit, has been abnormally and unjustifiably low.
- The KPMG evaluation gives 4 pages explanation (pp 125-128) to why referrals to drug treatment should not be expected to be high. Notably, though, 20% of all tobacco smokers, using the most addictive of all commonly used drugs, are reported in this KPMG explanation to be currently ready to quit at any point in time.
- Alternately, the MSIC has had opportunity to continuously assist their clients over a period of many years and not just at a single point of time. If, as the KPMG evaluation states on page 125, research shows that 37% of tobacco smokers are quitting and 42% are contemplating quitting, why would referral rates to drug treatment not be significantly higher than the 11% of clients recorded by the MSIC in 2003 and 2007?
(Drug Free Australia, Analysis of KPMG Evaluation of the Sydney MSIC pp 3, 17-18)

6. YDHF asserts: One of the clear benefits of a SIF is the ability to provide and observe the use of sterile injecting equipment which helps prevent the spread of blood borne viruses (diseases) such as HIV into the community.

Drug Free Australia's response:

- Not one of the government-funded evaluations of the Sydney injecting room between 2003 and 2010 found any attributable change in blood-borne disease incidence in the Kings Cross area.
- The claim that the supervision of injections by clients after being given clean needles will somehow better reduce HIV and Hep C is a fallacy. Any drug user who has bothered to avail themselves of clean needles from the many free needle outlets surrounding the MSIC is 100% likely to use one of those clean needles if unsupervised, in exactly the same manner as if supervised.

7. YDHF asserts: In Sydney a survey of local businesses people indicated that the majority (nearly 70%) supported the MSIC and *there is now business support* for a SIF in Melbourne

Drug Free Australia's response:

- MP Pru Goward's 2010 speech to the NSW Lower House cited a survey of businesses immediately around the injecting room (and not those in Woolloomooloo, Potts Point or Elizabeth Bay in the same 2011 postcode)
"I received a survey of 65 properties that revealed that 63 opposed the centre, one was unwilling to give an answer and another thought it might be a good location. All the owners were prepared to sign the petition, and 97 per cent of them wanted the facility removed."
"I conclude by referring to the businesses and landowners in the Kings Cross

area. They asked me to meet them—they said they had never been visited by a parliamentary delegation. They have finally decided to come out and express their opposition to the centre. The local chamber of commerce essentially went broke fighting the original decision, so there is no longer an official business group. However, I certainly saw a lot of individual business owners and landowners. They strongly challenge the survey findings that 70 per cent of local businesses accepted the centre and believed that it reduced the number of needles in the street.”

8. YDHF asserts: Another benefit of a SIF is the opportunity it offers to monitor the person who is using the facility and to reduce the risk of overdose and other adverse events.

Drug Free Australia’s response:

- “The KPMG evaluation found no measurable impact on drug overdose deaths in Kings Cross, nor on nearby hospital presentations for drug overdose.” (see KPMG 2010 Evaluation p 20)
- “Drug Free Australia calculates that the injecting room statistically saved less than 0.5 lives per year, or 4 lives in 9 years, at a cost of more than \$23 million - an extremely poor cost/benefit ratio. This calculation of lives saved is notably backed by the only two major international reviews of injecting rooms worldwide.” (Drug Free Australia, Analysis of KPMG Evaluation of the Sydney MSIC p2)
- The recent Lancet study claiming that Vancouver’s Insite injecting room had reduced overdose deaths by 35% in its immediate surrounding area while the rest of of Vancouver saw 9% decreases is terminally flawed. The study clearly manipulated coroner’s data, (where Vancouver overdose deaths actually increased, not decreased, from 2002 to 2005 despite the injecting room opening late 2003), and also failed to mention the exodus of drug users and associated overdoses from the area around the facility which had had vastly increased, zero-tolerance policing since 2003. (DFA has exposed these errors to Lancet and is working on retraction of the study despite knowing that Lancet’s Editor-in-Chief is a close colleague of two of the Lancet study’s authors and that Lancet has a track record of taking years to admit errors).

9. YDHF asserts: Ambulance services in NSW have reported reduced calls (and less siren noise) to attend overdoses in the vicinity of the MSIC thereby saving ambulance time and resources.

Drug Free Australia’s response:

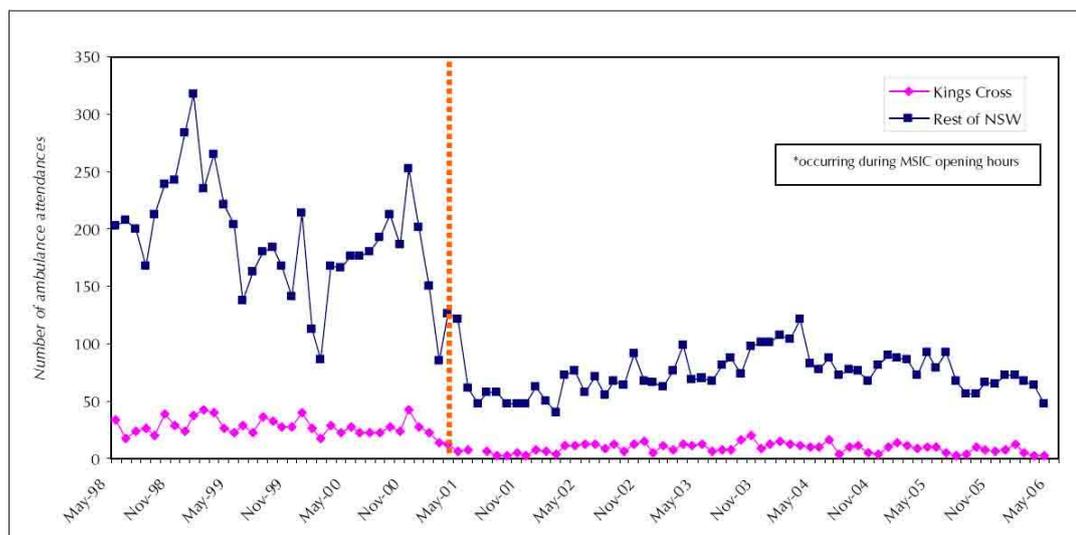
- “The KPMG evaluation supports the erroneous conclusion of a 2007 MSIC evaluation which credited the MSIC with reducing ambulance callouts in the Kings Cross postcode. This previous evaluation failed to examine or even consider the effect, beyond that of the heroin drought, of sniffer dog policing which has been central to deterring drug users and dealers from the area for eight of the MSIC’s nine years of operation.”

- Calculations by Drug Free Australia show that the MSIC should only be intervening in 10-12 overdoses per year, rather than 390 per year. If rates of overdose were normal in the MSIC, it would reduce ambulance callouts in the area by less than 5%.” (Drug Free Australia, Analysis of KPMG Evaluation of the Sydney MSIC p2)

Below are graphs copied from the various government-funded evaluations of the injecting room which, when viewed sequentially, very, very clearly explain the reductions in ambulance callouts in Kings Cross. And it has nothing to do with the injecting room's effect on overdoses.

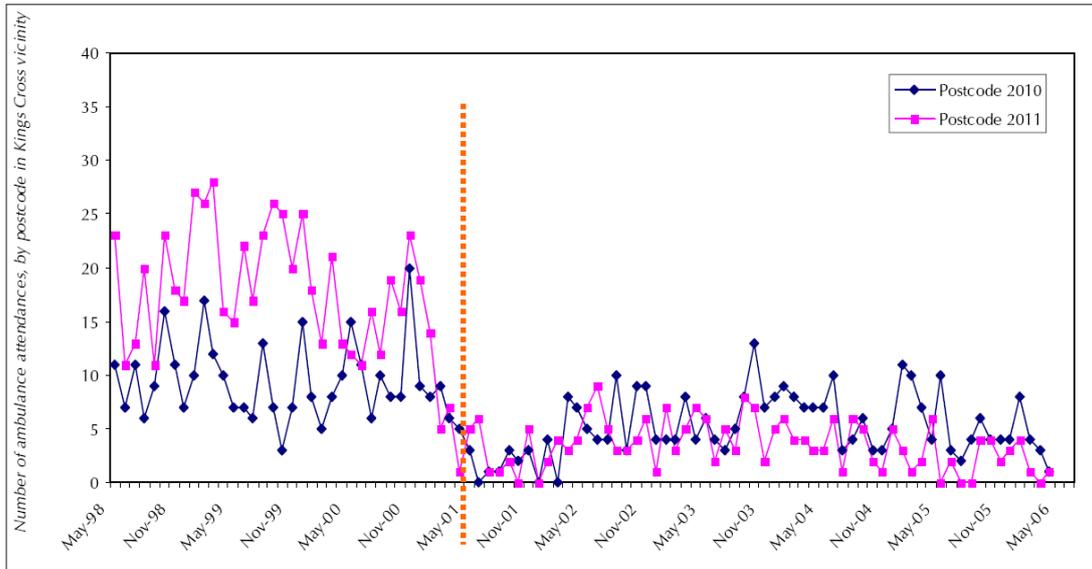
- The heroin drought starting in the year 2000 cut overdoses throughout the whole of NSW by 61%. The injecting room opened months after the sharp declines in overdose deaths NSW-wide. This graph comes directly from the injecting room’s own 2003 government-funded evaluation. First, remember this fact: the 61% reduction for all of NSW was from the heroin drought and not the injecting room . . .

Figure 6: NSW Ambulance attendances at suspected opioid overdoses, within MSIC opening hours: May 1998 to end April 2006



- Here is a second graph from the injecting room’s own 2003 government-funded evaluation. It shows the effect of the heroin drought combined with sniffer dog policing introduced to Cabramatta shortly after the sniffer dogs from the Sydney Olympics of 2000 were diverted to drug prevention activity in that drug hotspot. See what a difference sniffer dogs made to Cabramatta as compared to the rest of NSW. (Cabramatta graph follows)

Figure 7: NSW Ambulance attendances at suspected opioid overdoses in postcodes 2010 and 2011, within MSIC opening hours: May 1998 to end April 2006



- Now what do you see here? With the heroin drought reducing overdoses for all NSW by 61%, we would expect overdoses for Kings Cross and Darlinghurst (usually 12% of NSW’s total combined) to likewise reduce in early 2001 by the same 61%. But with sniffer dog policing introduced in 2002 in Kings Cross only (2011) we see the 80% reductions in overdoses we saw above with Cabramatta, but not very significant reductions for Darlinghurst – certainly not 61%. Why? Kings Cross drug users now using and overdosing in Darlinghurst, not Kings Cross. So what has reduced ambulance callouts for overdose in Kings Cross by 80%? Sniffer dogs. It's quite obvious once you see all the data.

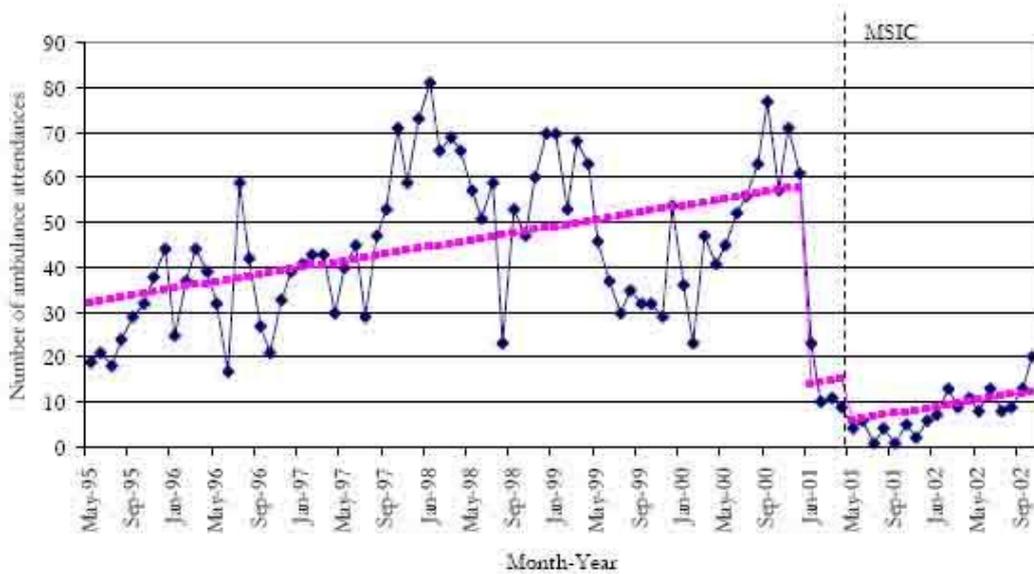


Figure 3.3: Cabramatta: Times series of ambulance attendances

- **Are sniffer dogs likely to displace drug users and their overdoses from Kings Cross to the next suburb? Read below and discover for yourself why ambulance callouts dropped significantly around the injecting room - clearly the displacement. Just another specious claim for the injecting room.**

UPDATE: Drug sniffer-dog alert site strains under pressure

By [Rachel Lebihan](#) on May 23rd, 2002

<http://www.zdnet.com.au/update-drug-sniffer-dog-alert-site-strains-under-pressure-120265435.htm>

The controversial [site](#), that sends registered members of the public SMS messages to warn them where police are patrolling drug detection dogs, was swamped by so many people yesterday that outages were prevalent as the server struggled to cope with demand.

The site, operated by NSW Council for Civil Liberties and Redfern Legal Centre, was set up on Tuesday, May 21 and saw "hundreds of thousands" of people attempting to log on yesterday when the site was at its height of public awareness following an [outcry from NSW Police Minister Michael Costa](#) and his call for the site to be taken down.

According to NSW Council for Civil Liberties president Cameron Murphy, the site was flooded and went down for short periods immediately after it was aired on yesterday's television and radio news programs. "It's probably the hottest site in Australia at the moment," he told *ZDNet Australia*. "For short periods the server could not cope...it's quite clear it's nothing other than demand."

Touting it as an "IT first", Murphy says this is the first time an "instant message" service like this has been put in place. The site, he explained, has a number of verified scouts in the field who warn of patrolling sniffer dogs by sending a code via SMS to the Web site server. The server verifies the scout and sends an SMS out to people registered in specific areas warning them of the detection dogs.

Importantly, here are the significant things YDHF didn't bother to mention

1. Clients of the injecting room average just one in every 35 injections in the room. 34 out of every 35 injections are on the street, in a toilet, a car or at home. So why have an injecting room if their safety is all that matters?
2. Rates of overdose in the injecting room are a staggering 32 times higher than clients' own overdose histories as recorded in their intake questionnaire.
3. Ex-clients are recorded in Hansard as claiming that the overdose rate is so extraordinarily high because clients go there to experiment with cocktails of illegal and prescription drugs.
4. This inevitably means that the injecting room is increasing the traffic of illegal drugs.
5. The injecting room's own 2003 government-funded evaluation recorded data indicating a substantial honey-pot effect drawing drug users and dealers into the streets around the room – thus the introduction of sniffer dogs in 2002.

For more information see:

http://www.drugfree.org.au/fileadmin/Media/Reference/DFA_Injecting_Room_Booklet.pdf

- this 12 page booklet exposes the early evaluations of the injecting room

http://www.drugfree.org.au/fileadmin/library/Policies_Legislation_and_law/DFA_Analysis_Injecting_Room_2010.pdf - this 31 page document exposes the errors in the injecting room's final evaluation in 2010 by KPMG

<http://www.quadrant.org.au/magazine/issue/2010/11/blinded-by-the-dominant-ideology> - Quadrant article exposes the strategies used by the injecting room evaluators whereby they made optimistic conclusions that were not supported by the data they gave, went silent on negative outcomes, excluded obvious causes or simply forgot to do vital calculations that would have compromised the project in the public's view

Regards

Gary Christian

Secretary
Drug Free Australia
65 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000
Phone: (08) 8244 1185

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