

WHY AUSTRALIA SHOULD NOT DECRIMINALISE DRUGS

Australia21 and NDARC, two Australian entities sympathetic towards the use of illegal drugs, are pushing our politicians and media to advocate for the decriminalisation of all illegal drugs, including heroin and ice.



But decriminalisation mostly increases drug use and Australians want LESS use. Convicting users is a major deterrent to drugs while encouraging rehab. When users can show they are clean for 3-5 years, then, and not before, is the time to wipe their conviction.



increased drug use after decriminalisation

In a recent push by Australia21 and NDARC, Australian politicians and media were told that decriminalisation does not increase drug use. The evidence demonstrates the opposite, beginning with evidence from the USA.

Oregon - 18-29 year olds

- Oregon decriminalised cannabis in 1973
- After 12 months cannabis use by 18 - 29 year olds was up 12% (use for all US States slightly decreased in 1973)



12% increase in first year

California - 18-29 year olds

- California decriminalised cannabis on January 1, 1975
- After 10 months cannabis use by 18 - 29 year olds was up 15% (all US states increased less than 1% as shown in the table [right])



15% increase in first year

11 US States - all ages

- By 1978 11 US States decriminalised cannabis, with increased use of 8%



8% above the remaining US States

If tobacco use by young people rose 12-15% in 12 months, we would be appalled and take immediate action.

The Success of 'Just Say No'

The table copied below is the official US data on cannabis use from 1974-1996 across various age groups. This table unequivocally shows the success of the 'Just Say No' anti-drug campaign implemented by President Reagan's wife, Nancy, in 1980.

Pro-drug-use lobbyists such as those at Australia21 and NDARC have long told our politicians that Just Say No never worked. But compare the 'Last Year' use of 12-17 and 18-25 year olds in 1979 (before Just Say No commenced) with 1992 when the drug legalisation lobby started their campaign to overwhelm the success of the Just Say No campaign.

Reductions were 68% and 52% respectively. **Criminalisation clearly maintained a downward pressure on drug use.**

Table 2.1. Trends in Prevalence of Lifetime and Last Year Marijuana Use by Age¹ (NHSIDA 1974-1996)

	1974	1976	1977	1979	1982	1986	1988	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lifetime														
12-17 years	23.0	22.4	28.0	26.7	23.2	20.1	15.0	12.7	11.1	9.1	9.9	13.6	16.2	16.8
18-25 years	52.7	52.9	59.9	66.1	61.3	57.6	54.6	50.4	48.8	46.6	45.7	41.9	41.4	44.0
26-34 years	-	-	-	45.0	51.5	54.1	57.6	56.5	55.2	54.3	54.9	52.7	51.8	50.5
35+ years	9.9	12.9	15.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35+ years	-	-	-	9.0	10.4	13.9	17.6	19.6	21.1	22.2	23.8	25.4	25.3	27.0
Last Year														
12-17 years	16.5	16.4	22.3	21.3	17.7	16.7	10.7	9.6	8.5	6.8	8.5	11.4	14.2	13.0
18-25 years	34.2	35.6	38.7	44.2	37.4	34.0	26.1	23.0	22.9	21.2	21.4	21.4	21.8	23.8
26-34 years	-	-	-	20.5	21.4	20.2	14.2	14.4	11.6	11.5	11.1	11.5	11.8	11.3
35+ years	3.8	5.4	6.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35+ years	-	-	-	4.3	6.2	4.3	3.7	4.2	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.1	3.4	3.8

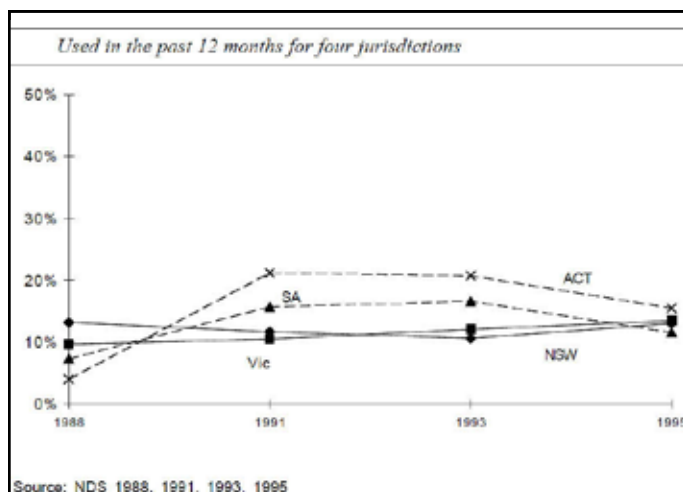
increased drug use after decriminalisation

While Australia21 and NDARC claim decriminalisation doesn't increase drug use, they need only study use here in Australia and overseas in the Netherlands under the two different decriminalisation regimes.

South Australia decriminalised cannabis in 1987, followed by the ACT in 1993. The graphs below from the Australian Government's Monograph 31 using Household Survey data show sharp rises in cannabis use for both jurisdictions, with ACT use rising during the public decriminalisation campaign. Cannabis use for both appears to come off a very low base of cannabis use as compared to NSW and Victoria which already had previously entrenched cannabis problems.



ACT had a greater than 13% increase from 1988 to 1995, with SA showing a similar trajectory. There was no survey for 1988



The Netherlands' Liberal Policies

The Netherlands never technically decriminalised cannabis use, but instructed police not to intervene in the burgeoning industry selling cannabis. They argued that cannabis was relatively harmless and if young people were given access free from criminal suppliers, they would avoid buying hard drugs.

By 1996 the Netherlands' liberal policy had yielded the highest drug use in Western Europe outside the English-speaking UK and Ireland where early enthusiasm for the USA's drug liberalisation had produced high illicit drug use. The 'separation of markets' was a failure, with speed, ecstasy and cocaine use by secondary students the highest in non-English speaking Europe.

	Year	Sample	SCHOOL Surveys Lifetime	
			All illegal drugs	Cannabis
Austria	1994	2250	9.9%	9.5%
Belgium (Fle.) (1)	1996	2391	-	19.6%
Belgium (Fle.) (2)	1998	9211	-	23.7%
Denmark (1)	1995	2571	-	18.0%
Denmark (2)	1999	1557	-	24.4%
Finland (1)	1995	2300	5.5%	5.2%
Finland (2)	1999	Preliminar	-	(10%)
France (1)	1993	12391	15.3%	11.9%
France (2)	1997	9919	27.5%	23.0%
Greece (1)	1993	10543	4.5%	3.0%
Greece (2)	1998	8557	11.4%	10.2%
Ireland	1995	1849	37.0%	37.0%
Italy (1)	1995	1641	21.0%	19.0%
Italy (2)	1999	20000	-	19.0%
Luxembourg	1998	660	-	18.5%
Netherlands	1996	10455	31.7%	31.1%
Portugal	1995	4767	4.7%	3.8%
Spain (1)	1996	19191	29.6%	24.3%
Spain (2)	1998	18348	33.9%	28.0%
Sweden (1)	1997	5683	7.6%	6.8%
Sweden (2)	1998	5455	7.7%	7.2%
United Kingdom (1)	1995	7722	42.0%	41.0%
United Kingdom (2)	1997	28756	39.8%	37.5%



the UK decriminalised ...then recriminalised

The UK's New Labour government under Tony Blair reclassified cannabis from a class B to a Class C drug, effectively making its use decriminalised. The same New Labour Government reversed the classification back to Class B in 2009, admitting they had made an error.

On 18 March 2007 a UK tabloid, the Independent wrote: "In 1997, this newspaper launched a campaign to decriminalise (cannabis). If only we had known then what we can reveal today... Record numbers of teenagers are requiring drug treatment as a result of smoking skunk, the highly potent cannabis strain that is 25 times stronger than resin sold a decade ago. More than 22,000 people were treated last year for cannabis addiction - and almost half of those affected were under 18. With doctors and drugs experts warning that skunk can be as damaging as cocaine and heroin, leading to mental health problems and psychosis for thousands of teenagers, The Independent on Sunday has today reversed its landmark campaign for cannabis use to be decriminalised."



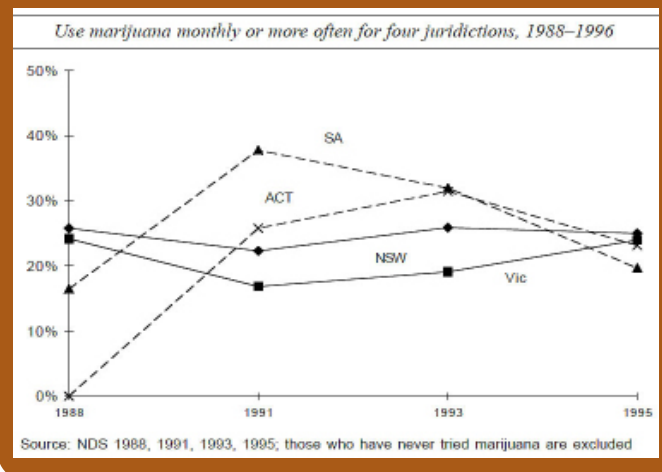
The Guardian reported on 4 April 2008 the words of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, "I believe that if we're sending out a signal, particularly to teenagers - and particularly those at the most vulnerable age, young teenagers - that in any way we find cannabis acceptable, given all we know about the way

cannabis is being sold in this country, that is not the right thing to do. There's a stronger case now for sending out a signal that cannabis is not only illegal, it's unacceptable." **Clearly, decriminalisation multiplied too much harm.**

'WE THOUGHT IT WAS LEGAL'

A 1998 Federal Government study led by Robert Ali found South Australian cannabis offences went from 6,231 in 1987/8 to 17,425 in 1993/4. When researchers questioned users half of them said "We thought cannabis was now legal", which likely drove the massive increases in use shown below. 40% of these 17,000+ users failed to pay their fine, attracting criminal convictions for not doing so . . . such that there were more criminal convictions in 1993/4 than prior to decriminalisation.

Importantly, the 2013 National Household Strategy Household Survey indicated that 29.1% of Australians cite their reason for not using drugs as for 'reasons related to the law' (Table S25.5). Criminalisation of drug use is clearly a major deterrent.



Australians want LESS drugs, not more

The decriminalisation of ALL harmful illicit drugs, as proposed by Australia 21 and NDARC, will not reduce drug use. From 1985 to 1998, Australia led the world with liberal drug policies, reaping the highest levels of drug use in the developed world. Despite less drugs since 1998, drug use is still too high. It is time to tighten drug policy, not further liberalise it.

Australians do not have favourable attitudes towards illicit drug use. The results of Table 9.4 in the Federal Government's 2013 NDS Household Survey (right) show that the vast majority of Australians do not give their approval to regular use of illicit drugs, with less than 2.5% approving of ecstasy, speed, ice, cocaine and heroin. Despite the media being strangely silent on the psychosis-producing effect of cannabis of late, 90% of Australians still do not give approval to its regular use.

All drugs? Australians don't want it

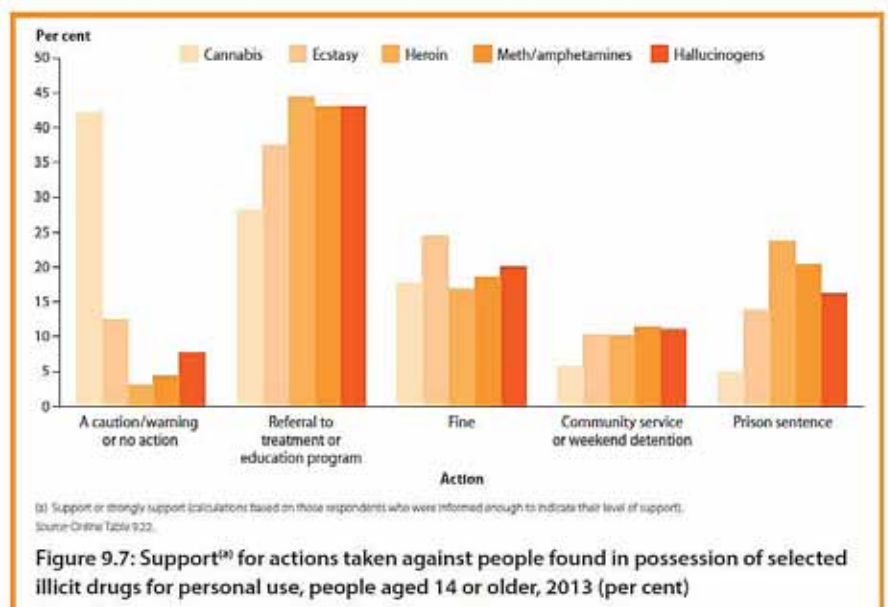
The same 2013 survey, at Figure 9.7 (right) shows that less than 20% of Australians support decriminalisation strategies such as fines or cautions for ALL drugs. Australians tend to see jail/detention as a school for criminals, so the most popular option is rehabilitation - programs or counselling to get them to **stop using**.

Drug Free Australia also asserts that support for light cautions or fines for cannabis use would evaporate if Australians were exposed to the spread of decriminalisation statistics.

Decriminalisation will deliver what they don't want.

Table 9.4: Personal approval of the regular use by an adult of selected drugs, people aged 14 years or older, 2007 to 2013 (per cent)

Drug	2007	2010	2013
Tobacco	14.3	15.3	14.7
Alcohol	45.2	45.1	45.1
Cannabis	6.6	8.1	9.8#
Ecstasy	2.0	2.3	2.4
Meth/amphetamine ^(a)	1.2	1.2	1.4
Cocaine/crack	1.4	1.7	1.6
Hallucinogens	1.7	2.4	3.1#
Inhalants	0.8	1.0	0.9
Heroin	1.0	1.2	1.2





mixed results in Portugal

A document by NDARC advocating decriminalisation tells our politicians and media that Portugal's 2001 decriminalising of all illicit drugs has led to decreased drug use overall. Here are Portugal's official statistics, taken from their web-available REITOX reports to the European Union's central drug agency, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

First, Drug Use Rose

Since the implementation of decriminalisation drug use rose by 2007 - compare the grey bars in the REITOX 2014 graph below. While cannabis use increased marginally, cocaine use doubled as did use of speed and ice. For younger people under the age of 34 the use of speed and ice quadrupled.

Opiate Use was Already Falling

Admirably, opiate use which had topped OECD countries in 1998 at a staggering 0.9% according to the United Nation's World Drug Report for 2000, halved to 0.46% by 2005. However half of that decrease predated decriminalisation, with 0.7% recorded in the UN World Drug Report for the year 2000. It is not clear what dynamic was in play for the 22% decrease in heroin use by 2000.

It is noteworthy that the 0% heroin use recorded for 2012 seems at odds with other data in the REITOX 2014 report (p71) which records that presentations for heroin use scored higher for outpatients and for detox units than any other type of illicit drug. Heroin also made up 42% of residential rehab admissions.

Similar Decreases Found Across Europe After 2007

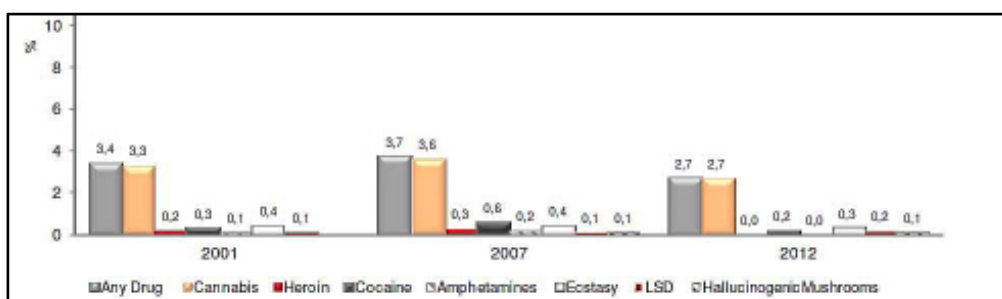
While drug use in Portugal decreased after the 2007 survey, UN Drug Reports show a similar decreasing trend for other European countries which had not decriminalised all drugs.

Italy - Opiates	0.8% (2005)	0.48% (2011)
Spain - Opiates	0.6% (2000)	0.29% (2012)
Switzerland - Opiates	0.61% (2000)	0.1% (2011)
Italy - Cocaine	1.1% (2001)	0.6% (2012)
Italy - Speed/Ice	0.4% (2005)	0.09% (2012)
Austria - Speed/Ice	0.8% (2004)	0.5% (2012)

High School Drug Use Now Higher Than in 2001

The most troubling development in Portugal has been the rise in overall drug use by school students, with levels in 2011 higher than the advent of decriminalisation.

6% of students in Portugal's 3rd cycle of Basic Education (typically aged 13-15) had used illicit drugs in the previous month in 2001, but by 2011 that figure had risen to 6.2%. For Secondary students (aged 16-18), 12.1% had used illicit drugs in 2001 compared to 16.4% in 2011, an increase of 36% according to a comparison between the REITOX Reports for 2008 and 2014. Increasing high-school student drug use does not bode well for Portugal's future.





...but major decreases with our Tough on Drugs

Those lobbying worldwide for the decriminalisation of all drugs cite the 'success' of Portugal. They remain silent about the 36% increase in high-school drug use since 2001. Australia, though, under its Tough on Drugs policy, reduced overall drug use by 39%. Portugal's policy delivered more drugs, then less drugs, while Australia's policy uniformly delivered a lot less drugs - exactly what Australians want.

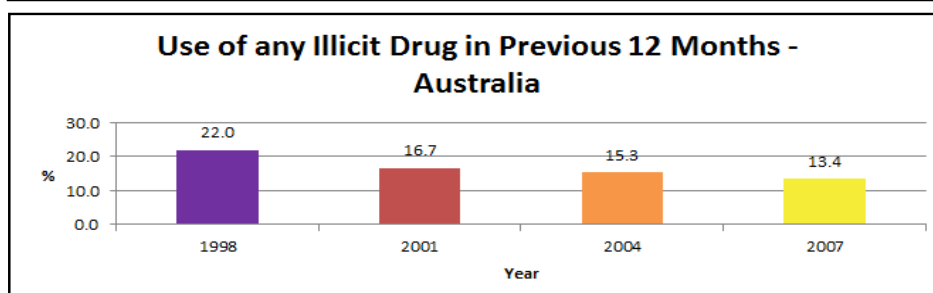
Australian use of all illicit drugs was cumulatively the highest in the developed world in the late 1990s, with cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy use higher than any other country. Heroin use at 0.8% was second only to Portugal's 0.9%, and cocaine use was second only to the USA.


With the implementation of Tough on Drugs in 1998 an emphasis was put on more rehabilitation availability and on nationwide publicity encouraging parents to talk to their children about drugs, aware that a majority of Australian parents have tried illicit drugs in the past before rejecting them, according to the Household Surveys.

Between 1998 and 2007 Australia halved its cannabis use, reduced amphetamines by 40%, and use of heroin by 75%. With many heroin users switching to prescription opiates sourced from rogue medicos, opiate use was still 50% below 1998 levels. Cocaine use rose 15% and ecstasy rose a troubling 46%, but overall drug use decreased 39% as seen in Table 2.1 taken from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey report for 2010.

When it is understood that Portugal's decriminalised drug policy has also made a priority of rehabilitation, where a drug user can in fact be forcibly coerced into rehab, Australia's Tough on Drugs criminalised prevention model fared far better. This indicates that Portugal's decriminalisation runs interference against its prevention and rehabilitation push.

Drug/behaviour	1993	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010
Illicit drugs (excluding pharmaceuticals)							
Cannabis	12.7	13.1	17.9	12.9	11.3	9.1	10.3
Ecstasy ^(b)	1.2	0.9	2.4	2.9	3.4	3.5	3.0
Meth/amphetamines ^(c)	2.0	2.1	3.7	3.4	3.2	2.3	2.1
Cocaine	0.5	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.6	2.1
Hallucinogens	1.3	1.9	3.0	1.1	0.7	0.6	1.4
Inhalants	0.6	0.4	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.6
Heroin	0.2	0.4	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Ketamine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.3	0.2	0.2
GHB	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.1	0.1	0.1
Injectable drugs	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.4
Any illicit ^{(d)(e)}	14.0	16.7	22.0	16.7	15.3	13.4	14.7





conviction 'spent' after 3-5 years

Decriminalisation has typically increased drug use, yet 98-99% of Australians do not approve of heroin, cocaine, speed, ice and ecstasy, while 90% do not approve of cannabis. With virtual unanimity Australians do not approve of drugs because they present unacceptable harms to the community. Asking a user to become drug free is an entirely reasonable expectation. But decriminalisation removes any meaningful consequences that might give a user reason to become drug-free, and for that reason it should be rejected.

Alternately, Drug Free Australia advocates the UK concept of 'spent' convictions where drug use remains a criminal offence. Once a user has lived drug-free for a period of 3-5 years, the conviction is wiped from their record, providing no impediment to employment or travel. Such an approach upholds the required meaningful consequences that encourage rehabilitation.

Decriminalisation fails because it gives no incentive for a drug user to do anything but continue using drugs, given fines and cautions have little deterrent value with little price to pay. Alternately, criminalisation, as already demonstrated, deters around 30% of Australians from using drugs, lowering use.

Despite the Portuguese experiment using coerced rehab alongside decriminalisation, it has nevertheless delivered poor outcomes when compared with our 'un-decriminalised' Tough on Drugs. The criminalised approach has created much less use.

The community has every right to expect protection from drug use. Compassion for community members demands convictions . . . and compassion for drug users demands a spent conviction.

JUST WHO IS PUSHING FOR THIS?

Australia21 is part of the global movement advocating for the **LEGALISATION** of ALL illicit drugs - heroin, cocaine, speed, ice, ecstasy and cannabis - with the assumption that drug users have a 'right' to use. This imagined 'right' which does not exist is elevated above the very real rights of a community to protect its members from harm.

A key member of Australia21 is Dr Alex Wodak, who has been the head of the Australian drug legalisation movement since 1992. Dr Wodak founded the National Drug and Alcohol Research Council, (NDARC) which recently helped him write a decriminalisation position paper for Australia21.

If organisations seeking the normalisation of drugs are those pushing decriminalisation it is evident that they see it as a strategy towards their ultimate goal of normalising drug use. Less drugs has never been their priority.

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Drug Free Australia is the peak organisation for organisations and family associations around Australia that seek the prevention of illicit drug use.

Drug Free Australia's vision is: Communities are well-informed about the harms of illicit drugs and empowered with anti-drug strategies.



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