

Why Australian politicians must not surrender to illicit drugs



In April 2012, Australia21 launched a report (left), campaigning to legalise and regulate drugs such as heroin, ice, cocaine and cannabis in Australia.

This document interrogates its premises, conclusions and rhetoric against the evidence.



What ‘failed war on drugs’?

The Australia21 Report asserts:

“The war (on drugs) has failed internationally and in Australia” (p 12) and “Act urgently: the war on drugs has failed and policies need to change now” (p 14)

BUT, CONSIDER THIS . . .

1. To begin with, Australia has NEVER had a war on drugs

- handing free needles to drug users
- maintaining users for up to 40 years on methadone
- giving drug users injecting rooms

These cannot possibly be construed as a war on drugs.

For 27 years we have been facilitating drug use - anything but a war. Most of those years have failed to acknowledge and prioritise primary prevention.

Australia21’s catchcry is neither true nor relevant in Australia, nor for the majority of countries in the world with their harm reduction policies.

2. What policing ‘war’ on anything is premised on eradicating it?

If we need to use the term ‘war’ how does Australia21’s logic follow in these scenarios?

Drink driving - we’ve failed to eradicate it. Do we now legalise it?

Rape - do we give up on this and approve it, and let it continue unmonitored?

Stealing - failed to eradicate it. Legalise it?

Speeding drivers - failed to eradicate them. So let’s legalise it?

No, we maintain our policing of anti-social behaviours to control them rather than eradicate them, because if we don’t the resulting societal harms are catastrophic.

Australia21’s catchcry - “The war on drugs has failed” is exposed as false, misleading and ultimately vacuous.

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Drug Free Australia is the peak body 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.



'Tough on Drugs' had success

MARKED REDUCTIONS UNDER AUSTRALIA'S 'TOUGH ON DRUGS'

In 1998 the Federal Government, though bound to harm reduction policies since 1985, did introduce more prevention aspects into Australian drug policy with its Tough on Drugs Strategy.. Between 1998 and 2007, **cannabis use halved**, the use of **Speed and Ice was down 40%**, and **heroin use reduced by 75%** as can be seen by Table 2.1. (below) from page 8 of the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey of more than 26,000 Australians.

Table 2.1: Summary of recent^(a) drug use, people aged 14 years or older, 1993 to 2010 (per cent)

Drug/behaviour	1993	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	
Tobacco	29.1	27.2	24.9	23.2	20.7	19.4	18.1	↓
Alcohol	77.9	78.3	80.7	82.4	83.6	82.9	80.5	↓
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) excluding pharmaceuticals	13.7	14.2	19.0	14.2	12.6	10.9	12.0	↑

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=32212254712>

While cocaine use increased by 15%, and ecstasy by 46%, a cause for concern, the overall picture does not resemble Australia21's alarmism about unstoppable increases in Australian drug use (p 12). In some areas Australian drug use is **significantly decreased**. Why does Australia21 seek to mislead Australians and its politicians? Would not an objective assessment say that the results are mixed, but certainly not a failure, with the balance of results giving cause for optimism? Why this lack of truth on the Australian situation in positioning their supposed need for legalisation?

27 YEARS OF HARM REDUCTION...

The International Harm Reduction Association defines harm reduction as 'reducing the adverse health, social and economic costs of mood altering drugs *without necessarily reducing consumption*'. This has been Australia's central policy plank for 27 years and this intuitively would appear to be a sure way to increase a drug problem. The evidence from several countries who tried harm reduction and legalisation and abandoned both supports this.

STILL PART OF 'TOUGH ON DRUGS'

The founder of Australia's harm reduction approach, Dr Alex Wodak, boasted in a journal article titled 'Is the Federal Government Tough on Drugs?' that 'the most conservative Prime Minister Australia has ever had is the one who retained harm reduction as his government's public policy.'

How much more successful might Tough on Drugs have been with less of a harm reduction ideology running interference?

The success of prohibition

The Australia21 Report asserts:

"The current policy of prohibition discredits the law, which cannot possibly stop a growing trade that positively thrives on its illegality and black market status." (p 5)

Australia21 spuriously tells politicians that Prohibition has always failed. Their statement is easily tested.

- The **international laws against illicit drug use started in 1912**, and most countries worldwide were signed on by 1920
- Opium, morphine, cocaine and heroin were banned for recreational use, and **cannabis added in 1925**
- These drugs were prohibited because they were found from historical experience to be endangering individual users and, by extension, their communities.

Keeping this in mind, now take a look at the results from a massive study (below) of 90,000 Americans, born 1919 and after, looking at the year in which they began using various kinds of drugs, focusing on the last three types of drugs – the illegal ones.

The study is very revealing.

We see almost no drug use until the 1960s, giving the international prohibition of illicit drugs 50 years of demonstrated success - note the underlined age-groups below where illicit drug use first began. This clearly falsifies the Australia21 statement we are examining.

There is no other conclusion - **the prohibition of dangerous drugs DOES NOT discredit the law**. It has a proven track record of low drug use matched by 50 years of **almost non-existent criminal supply which most certainly did not thrive because of the illegality of drugs**, as they would have us believe in their statement.

TABLE 2—Percentages Using Alcohol, Cigarettes, and Other Drugs before Selected Ages, by Birth Cohort: 1991 through 1993 National Household Surveys on Drug Abuse (n = 87 915 Respondents)

Birth Cohort	Age	Years Age was Attained	% Using (SE)						
			Alcohol, Any Use	Alcohol, Regular Use	Cigarettes, Any Use	Cigarettes, Regular Use	Marijuana	Cocaine	Hallucinogens
1919–1929	15	1934–1944	9 (1)	2 (1)	24 (2)	5 (1)	0 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
	21	1940–1950	63 (2)	27 (2)	64 (2)	38 (2)	0 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
	35	1944–1964	82 (2)	45 (2)	74 (2)	52 (2)	1 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
1930–1940	15	1945–1955	10 (1)	2 (1)	30 (2)	6 (1)	1 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
	21	1951–1961	66 (2)	31 (2)	71 (2)	43 (2)	2 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
	35	1965–1975	84 (1)	52 (2)	78 (2)	56 (2)	6 (1)	1 (*)	0 (*)
1941–1945	15	1956–1960	11 (1)	2 (1)	34 (2)	6 (1)	1 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
	21	1962–1966	73 (2)	33 (2)	75 (1)	47 (2)	6 (1)	1 (*)	1 (*)
	35	1976–1980	89 (1)	58 (2)	80 (1)	58 (2)	24 (2)	4 (1)	3 (*)
1946–1950	15	1961–1965	11 (1)	2 (*)	35 (1)	6 (1)	1 (*)	0 (*)	0 (*)
	21	1967–1971	76 (1)	35 (1)	74 (1)	43 (1)	21 (1)	2 (*)	4 (1)
	35	1981–1985	90 (1)	57 (1)	80 (1)	53 (1)	38 (2)	9 (1)	9 (1)
1951–1955	15	1966–1970	14 (1)	2 (*)	37 (1)	6 (1)	3 (*)	0 (*)	1 (*)
	21	1972–1976	82 (1)	42 (1)	72 (1)	39 (1)	40 (1)	6 (1)	13 (1)
	35	1986–1990	92 (1)	61 (1)	77 (1)	48 (1)	50 (1)	19 (1)	16 (1)
1956–1960	15	1971–1975	20 (1)	4 (*)	39 (1)	7 (1)	12 (1)	0 (*)	2 (*)
	21	1977–1981	85 (1)	49 (1)	74 (1)	39 (1)	53 (1)	13 (1)	13 (1)
	15	1976–1980	25 (1)	5 (*)	41 (1)	8 (*)	17 (1)	1 (*)	1 (*)
1961–1965	21	1982–1986	85 (1)	53 (1)	70 (1)	36 (1)	55 (1)	17 (1)	13 (1)
	15	1981–1985	28 (1)	5 (*)	39 (1)	7 (*)	15 (1)	1 (*)	2 (*)
	21	1987–1991	86 (1)	54 (1)	70 (1)	33 (1)	51 (1)	16 (1)	12 (*)
1971–1975	15	1986–1990	33 (1)	6 (*)	37 (1)	7 (*)	13 (1)	1 (*)	2 (*)
	21*	1992–1996	86 (1)	55 (2)	68 (2)	33 (2)	51 (3)	13 (2)	11 (1)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1508375/pdf/amjph00013-0029.pdf>

WILL AUSTRALIA21 TELL THE TRUTH?

Australia21's website describes their "Australian review of the policy of prohibition instigated in 1953" (their words).

But prohibition of illicit drugs started in 1912. Why would they say 1953 - the date that only the medical use of heroin was added to the previous prohibitions? Its recreational use had long been illegal.

Recreational heroin use and deaths started in the 60s, so why hide the success of the first 50 prohibition years?

What has caused increased drug use?

What has driven the growth of illicit drug use over the last 50 years - is it, as Australia21 asserts, the prohibition of drug use, or something else?

In the late 1950's luminaries of the **counter-culture** Beat and Hippie movements such as **Allen Ginsberg** and **Timothy Leary** promoted illicit drug use as the yellow-brick road to enlightenment and Nirvana.

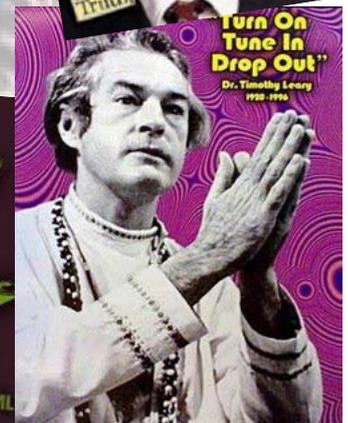
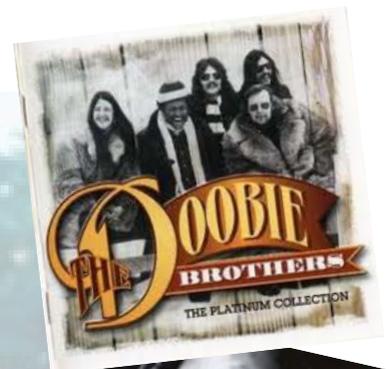
Aided by artists in the music industry and other artistic fields openly promoting drugs as cool and adventurous to a new generation naive of the damage done by opium and cocaine before the 1912 prohibitions, drug use skyrocketed as can be seen by the later generational cohorts in the Table on page 4. With organisations such as **NORML** seeking to thoroughly 'normalise' drug use and to wage war on prohibition by downplaying the real dangers of their drug of choice, why would drug use do anything but rise?

Unfortunately, these promoters of illicit drug use are **aided and abetted, unwittingly or otherwise, by the drug legalisation movement**, of which Australia21 is part.

On page 14 of their Australia21 report they say cannabis causes little harm, just as does NORML, despite literally thousands of journal studies demonstrating the opposite.

That the outright promotion of drug use, or the undermining of the truth about drugs, is responsible for increased use is patently obvious.

The hard question is - why does Australia21's analysis ignore something so obvious, positioning prohibition as the whipping boy for the damage done by pro-drug campaigners and sympathisers?



Legal drug vs illicit drug use

The Australia21 Report promotes:

"By defining the personal use and possession of certain psychoactive drugs as criminal acts, governments have also avoided any responsibility to regulate and control the quality of substances that are in widespread use. Some of these illicit drugs have demonstrable health benefits. Many are highly addictive and harmful when used repeatedly. In that respect they are comparable to alcohol and nicotine, which are legal in Australia and, as a result, are under society's control for quality, distribution, marketing and taxation." (p 4)

Australian substance use for the last 12 months, as recorded in the 2010 NDS Household Survey, are:

- Alcohol - 81%
- Tobacco – 18% (down from 60% in the 60s)
- Cocaine – 2%
- Speed/Ice – 2%
- Ecstasy – 3%
- Heroin – 0.2%
- Cannabis – 10% (up from 9% in 2007)

Low use of illicit drugs (black) is the success of Prohibition. Extensive use of legal drugs (red) is the price of legalisation.

Do Australians want more drugs or less drugs?

These percentages show that legalisation would lead to a far greater uptake of currently illicit drugs ie **more drugs**.

TWO IMPORTANT POINTS

1. If Australian Governments spent as much on the correction of gross public misinformation by the cannabis lobby as it did on anti-tobacco advertising over past decades we might well expect cannabis use percentages to be a fraction of what they are today.
2. The United Nations estimates that only 5% of the world's population uses illicit drugs. Why legalise for such a minority?

HOW DOES PROHIBITION ACHIEVE ITS RESULTS?

There is an almost iron rule in the political control of societal harms from alcohol and tobacco which says that **increases in the price of these substances will be inversely matched by decreases in harm.**

So as cigarettes become more expensive, less are smoked and harm is reduced. Politicians do indeed raise taxes on alcohol and tobacco to reduce use. Yet Australia21 would have us believe that such a given rule will not still hold with the illicit drugs – an appeal to illogic.

On page 15 they note that Prohibition raises the price of heroin to exorbitant levels, yet ask us to believe, **against all common evidence**, that lowering the price of heroin, as regulation would inevitably do, will not increase use as happens with our legal drugs.



US STATISTICS ON REGULATION

Australia21 wants all drugs legalised and regulated. But here are the US figures for alcohol and tobacco:

- Alcohol - \$15 billion tax collected for \$185 billion social cost
- Tobacco - \$25 billion tax for \$200 billion social costs

Taxing and regulating illicit drugs is economic foolishness.

More drugs or less drugs?

AUSTRALIAN DISAPPROVAL OF ILLICIT DRUG USE

As can be seen in Table 2.6 from the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, (the 2010 survey, with similar results, omits the 'Neither' column) the vast majority of Australians do not approve the regular use of illicit drugs.

93-97% disapprove of the regular use of heroin, speed/ice, cocaine and ecstasy while 76% disapprove of the regular use of cannabis.

In light of this very evident disapproval, it is also quite evident that **Australians do not want more drugs, but less drugs.**

Table 2.6: Approval of regular drug use by adults: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Drug	2004		2007				
	Persons	Males		Females		Persons	
	Approve	Approve	Neither ^(a)	Approve	Neither ^(a)	Approve	Neither ^(a)
	(per cent)						
Tobacco	39.3	15.8	23.2	12.9	21.9	14.3	22.5
Alcohol	77.0	51.7	32.0	38.9	35.5	45.2	33.8
Marijuana/cannabis	23.2	8.7	18.8	4.6	15.1	6.6	16.9
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(b)	8.0	11.5	14.9	9.4	11.8	10.4	13.3
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(b)	5.0	4.8	14.7	3.4	11.2	4.1	12.9
Steroids ^(b)	2.2	2.3	8.7	0.9	5.4	1.6	7.0
Barbiturates ^(b)	1.2	1.3	7.3	0.8	4.5	1.0	5.9
Inhalants	0.8	1.0	2.2	0.7	1.7	0.8	2.0
Heroin	0.9	1.3	2.6	0.7	1.8	1.0	2.2
Methadone ^(c) or Buprenorphine ^(d)	1.1	1.1	4.2	1.0	3.0	1.0	3.6
Meth/amphetamine(b)	3.1	1.5	3.2	0.9	2.1	1.2	2.7
Cocaine/crack	2.0	1.8	3.7	1.0	2.3	1.4	3.0
Hallucinogens	2.7	2.1	6.3	1.2	3.5	1.7	4.9
Ecstasy ^(d)	4.2	2.5	5.6	1.5	3.5	2.0	4.6
GHB	0.9	0.8	3.6	0.7	2.0	0.7	2.8
Ketamine	1.0	1.1	4.4	0.8	2.5	1.0	3.4

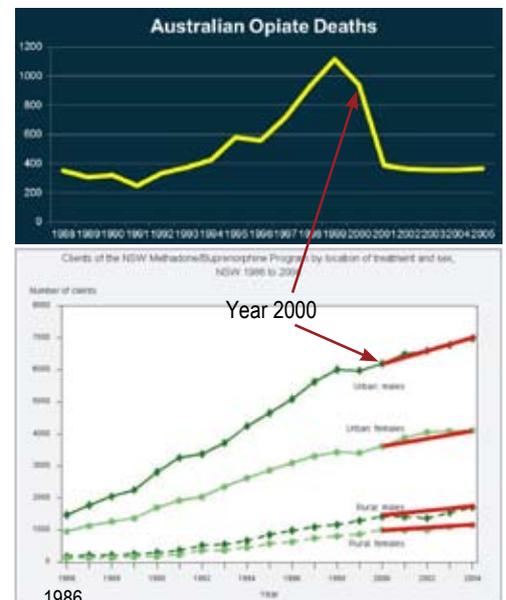
'TOUGH ON DRUGS' CREATED LESS DRUGS

A newspaper article in the Australian some years back claimed that Australia's long-standing policy of harm reduction was responsible for decreased heroin deaths during the 'Tough on Drugs' years which can be seen on the top graph right.

Was it harm reduction that decreased use and deaths in Australia?

The bottom right graph tracks the methadone places per year in NSW since 1986. The top line tracks methadone places for urban males, the line below for urban females, thence rural males then females. The growth in opiate overdose deaths until the peak in 1999 (1,115 deaths) tracks the growth in methadone places making methadone provision unlikely as a causal factor in reducing heroin deaths from 2000 on. The slight increases in methadone provision under 'Tough on Drugs' notably contrasts with the post-2000 plunging number of deaths.

What might cause this sharp divergence? - the slight expansion in harm reduction or the new drug prevention emphasis of 'Tough on Drugs'. It is prevention rather than a liberalised approach which clearly worked. **Australia21's drug liberal aspirations don't mesh with the Australian evidence.**





Australia 21 asserts:

“But there are many examples from Australia and other countries where liberalisation of approaches has neither increased consumption nor harms.” (p 14)

The Netherlands

In 1976 the Netherlands took a liberal approach to what they called the 'soft' drug cannabis but by the late 1990s **the Netherlands had the highest levels of 'hard' drug use in Europe**, outside of the drug-liberal United Kingdom/Ireland.

The Table (right) from the EMCDDA 2000 Annual Report Annex, shows **student drug use higher than all but the drug-liberal UK/Ireland** (all European countries where English was a second language arguably had a lesser level of penetration by US and UK musicians and artists who promoted illicit drug use). Over the last decade the country has become more politically conservative, bringing a tightening of drug policy with a greater majority of cannabis cafes closed and recently made unavailable to foreigners. Since 2004 the government has concentrated on anti-cannabis campaigns highlighting its harms, with some success.

Lifetime prevalence of use of different illegal drugs among 15- to 16-year-

	Year	Sample	SCHOOL Surveys Lifetime prevalence	
			All illegal drugs	Cannabis
Austria	1994	2250	9.9%	9.5%
Belgium (Fl.) (1)	1996	2391	-	19.6%
Belgium (Fl.) (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	Preliminary	-	(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%

Liberalised policy - MORE drugs

The USA

Table 21. Trends in Prevalence of Lifetime and Last Year Marijuana Use by Age¹ (NHSDA 1974-1996)

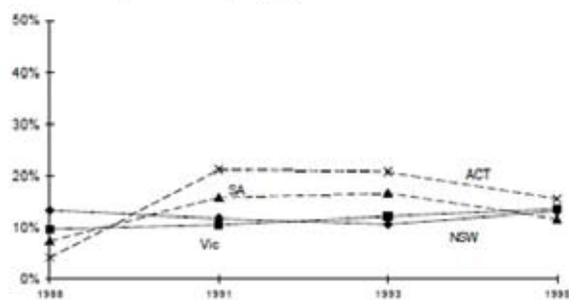
- Alaska **legalised** cannabis in 1975. A study in 1988 found that 72% of year 12 students had tried it. They **recriminalised** shortly thereafter.
- California **decriminalised** cannabis on January 1, 1975. 10 months after cannabis use by 18 - 29 year olds was up 15%
- Oregon **decriminalised** cannabis in 1973. 12 months after cannabis use by 18 - 29 year olds was up 12%
- If tobacco smoking rose by 12-15% in 12 months for young people in this country, we would be horrified
- Increases in US cannabis use from 1973-76 were negligible, as per the US Household Surveys (right). The reducing use from the US 1980s 'Just Say No' campaign is also evident, something legalisers deny

	1974	1976	1977	1979	1982	1985	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
26+ 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	18.5	18.4	22.3	21.3	17.7	16.7	10.7	9.6	8.5	6.9	8.5	11.4	14.2	13.0
18-25 years	34.2	35.0	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
26+ years	3.8	5.4	6.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35+ years	-	-	-	4.3	6.2	4.3	3.7	4.2	4.6	3.8	4.6	4.1	3.4	3.8

AUSTRALIA

South Australia **decriminalised** cannabis in 1987, followed by the ACT in 1993. The graphs below from NDS Household Surveys show **sharp rises in cannabis use** for both jurisdictions before equalling the use of NSW and Victoria, States with previously entrenched cannabis problems. SA offences went from 6,231 in '87/'88 to 17,425 in '93/'94 and when researchers asked users about the increases, many said "We thought cannabis was now legal."

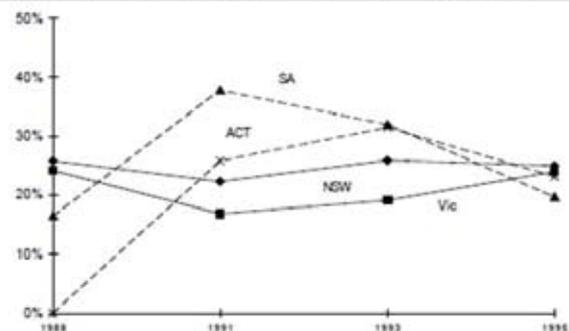
Figure 4.1: Used in the past 12 months for four jurisdictions



Source: NDS 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-drugs-mono31-cnt.htm>

Figure 4.2: Use marijuana monthly or more often for four jurisdictions, 1988-1996



Source: NDS 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995; those who have never tried marijuana are excluded

UK - RECRIMINALISED PREVENTION

In 2004 the UK's Labour Party **decriminalised** cannabis, but in 2009 the same party **recriminalised** cannabis stating that, "Skunk, a much stronger version of the drug, now dominates the UK's cannabis market. Skunk has swept other, less potent, forms of cannabis off the market, and now accounts for 81% of cannabis available on our streets, compared to just 30% in 2002." ". . . in the population as a whole, cannabis most likely plays a modest role in the development of psychotic illness."

In 2010, the Tory-led government implemented a new drug policy **prioritising drug prevention and demand reduction over harm reduction**. "This Government will work with people who want to take the necessary steps to tackle their dependency on drugs and alcohol, and will offer a route out of dependence by putting the goal of recovery at the heart of all that we do. We will build on the huge investment that has been made in treatment to ensure more people are tackling their dependency and recovering fully."

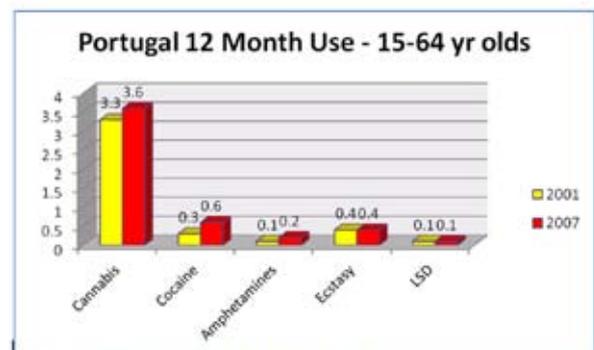
The UK has had some of the highest levels of illicit drug use in the OECD over the last decade or more (see graphs on page 11 of this document).

PORTUGAL

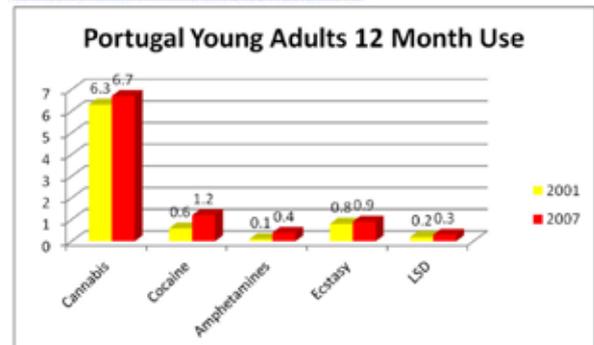
Australia21 asserts that:

"A decade ago, and with excellent results, Portugal decriminalised the possession of small quantities of all illicit drugs consistent with personal consumption." (p 5)

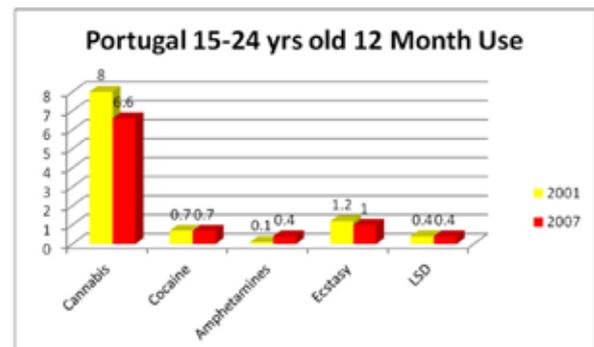
Portugal decriminalised ALL drugs in 2001. Compare the results below against Australia's results under 'Tough on Drugs' on page 3 of this document, remembering that harm reduction ideologies were still at play during Tough on Drugs.



<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/stats09/xpstab3>



<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/stats09/xpstab4>



<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/stats09/xpstab15>

Portugal is nothing like the success so constantly portrayed by Australia21, particularly in the media. There are far more increases than decreases in drugs, and in light of Australians wanting less drugs, not more drugs, Portugal is a failure. Any decreases may also be the result of mandatory rehab, as per the Swedish model, which Portugal adopted as part of its 2001 drug policy.

What 'right' to use drugs?

The Australia21 report cites the Global Commission on Drug Policy:

"2. That policies must be based on human rights and public health principles. That the stigmatisation and marginalisation of people who use certain drugs should cease . . ." (p 12)

Whose rights predominate?

The user's or the community's?

The appeal by Australia21 and other organisations promoting drug legalisation to human rights begs the question as to whether the rights of individual users should predominate over the rights of the community to be drug free. The following is relevant:

- **There is no such thing as a universal right** enshrined in any United Nations documentation **safeguarding a person's use of illicit drugs**
- The **United Nations' Right of the Child**, Article 33, specifically states that Member States ""shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, **to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs** and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties,

and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances."

- The United Nations Drug Conventions specifically **deny that drug use is a human right**
- In the United States approximately 60% of all domestic abuse and child abuse and neglect cases are drug-related. About 75% of children in foster care are there due to drug-using parents.

The community's own self-determining wish to live free of illicit drug use overrides any individual self-determining wish to use illicit drugs.



THE STIGMATISATION RUSE

While most every member of the Australian community surveyed believes that a drug user should have equal access to health services, most every member of the community likewise does *not* approve or accept the regular use of illicit drugs (see page 5 of this document).

Laws enacted by the community through its legislators to prohibit the use of certain drugs automatically stigmatise offenders. For instance, the Quantum marketing poll of 1,000 Australians every year consistently finds that 'use of

hard drugs' (92%) comes second to 'child pornography' (96%) amongst a list of socially unacceptable behaviours. Law enforcement against these socially unacceptable behaviours merely concretises a stigmatisation already inherent in their social unacceptability.

Australia21's call for the removal of the stigmatisation and marginalisation of drug users is essentially a call for the community to abdicate its sovereignty in shaping its own society democratically according to what the majority finds acceptable or unacceptable. Why does Australia21 back the individual drug user as if they have a right to use drugs?

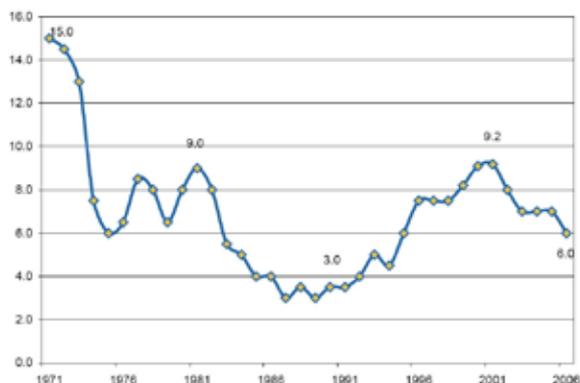
What works

THE SUCCESS OF SWEDEN

From having some of the highest illicit drug use in Europe, to having the lowest levels of drug use in the OECD, Sweden has given other Western countries an example of what works.

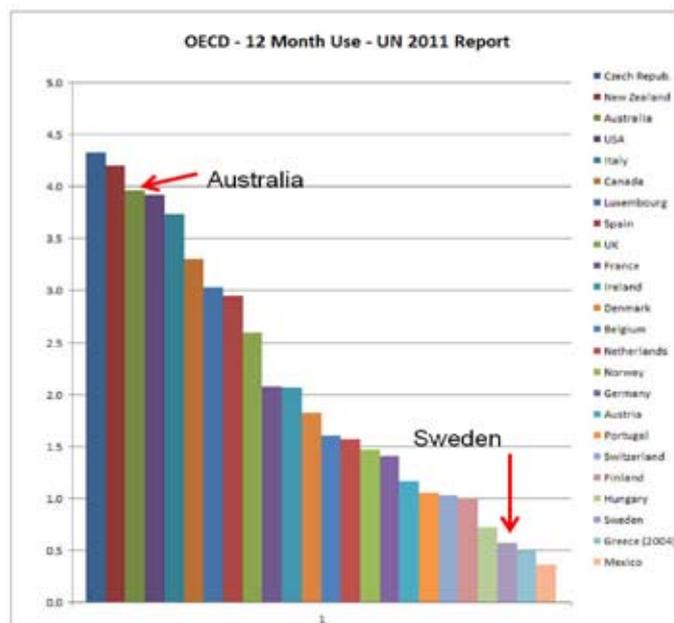
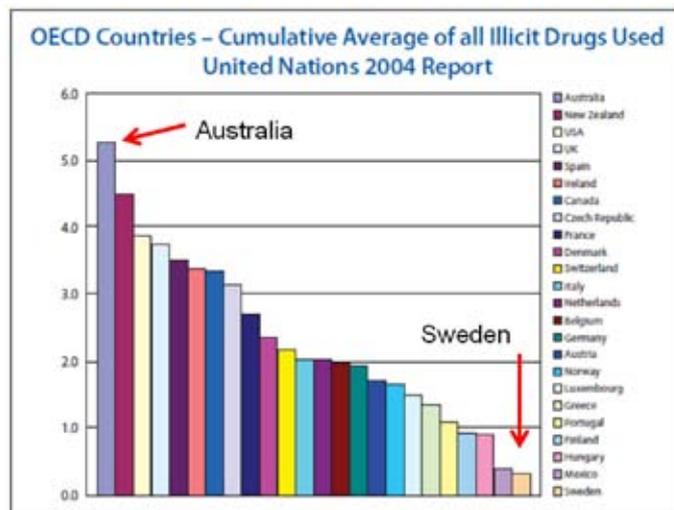
The United Nations graph below shows the effect of Sweden's drug policy which includes compulsory rehab of problem drug users. Note the rise in drug use in the 90s when Sweden was in recession and unable to fund its policy, and the reductions once funding was resumed.

Figure 5: Life-time prevalence of drug use among 15-16 year old students in Sweden, 1971-2006



By the late 90s Sweden had the lowest levels of drug use amongst OECD countries (see following graph), and

the 2011 UN report still shows Sweden amongst the lowest. 96% of polled Swedes support their country's compassionate, restrictive drug policy.



NALTREXONE SAVES LIVES

A Scottish study of methadone patients asked whether they wanted to stay addicted or get off drugs. 60% wanted to get off. Australia leads the world in Naltrexone implant technology which acts like Narcan in the blood of a heroin user, neutralising its effect and reducing craving. Only one in 1800 users will die while implanted, while 16 in every 1800 will die while on methadone, the alternative protective maintenance regime. The Federal Government does not fund one implant. Only the WA government does. Change is needed.



Recommendations

DRUG FREE AUSTRALIA RECOMMENDATIONS TO FEDERAL, STATE & TERRITORY POLITICIANS ARE:

1. Reject any movement towards the further liberalisation of drug policies in Australia.
2. Prioritise, as has Sweden and the United Kingdom, demand reduction and recovery from illicit drug use, making harm reduction subservient to the aim of getting drug users drug free.
3. Fund Naltrexone implants and suitable support networks for drug users who want to use them as a safeguard while becoming drug free, on the understanding that Naltrexone implants will not need to be, as for many methadone patients, used for life but rather for a year or two to ensure an ex-user has been stabilised.
4. Re-focus Australia's drug policy on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, where Article 33 states that Member States "shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances."
5. Further to point 4, reverse the emerging trend of increases in child abuse and neglect, both to the unborn child, and those who are growing up in families where illicit drugs are used regularly. Specifically, there are too many examples of increased rates of births of drug-addicted babies across the board, in Australia.
6. Join together with more countries against a more permissive drug policy, and in so doing, hold our commitment to the United Nations Drug Conventions.

ONE LAST WORD

Australia21 has called for the legalisation and regulation of ALL illicit drugs, deriving from their mistaken assumption that increased use derives from the prohibition of these substances. This means that extremely dangerous drugs such as heroin, crack cocaine and ice would be made available most likely on prescription.

Tobacco kills one in every 300 smokers every year, but heroin kills one in every 100 dependent users every year from overdose ALONE, before all other ways it kills are taken into account. Ice causes excessive, unaccept-

able violence and psychosis, yet we are asked to legalise these drugs.

And don't believe the common myths about heroin deaths in Australia being from unknown purity and criminal dealers cutting the drug with dangerous contaminants to enhance profits - the most authoritative review of heroin deaths (ANCD Research Paper 1 - 'Heroin Overdose') found that very few heroin deaths in Australia have been for those reasons. Rather, most deaths are from heroin being used with alcohol and/or prescription drugs, a poly-drug use practice which will persist if heroin were legalised, but with increased opiate deaths with the inevitable increases of use as the substance becomes cheaper.

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