

FACTUALLY INCORRECT STATEMENTS

Uniting Church statements	Drug Free Australia response
<p>“The (Uniting Church) campaign calls for society to question whether our drug laws reflect the essential worth and rights of every person.” (p 4)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is not a single human right that Australia has ever denied any Illicit drug user. But neither has there ever been a UN-sanctioned right to use drugs, something Uniting needs to be told 2. Further, there is no UN-sanctioned right to inflict harm on partners, children, parents, siblings, friends, other vehicle drivers and passengers, other workplace colleagues or the larger community. But this is a reality of drug use that drove a 110 year international consensus that illicit drugs are unacceptably harmful 3. Further, ‘HARM REDUCTION’ is the <u>centre-piece of Australia’s drug policy</u> precisely because illicit drugs cause unacceptable harms, but Uniting has to tacitly deny the many harms caused by drugs to support their extremely narrow compassion focus 4. Inflicting harm on others lessens the self-worth of drug users in their own eyes, let alone in those of their society. They know it is their voluntary choice to use drugs with the harms they inflict on others even if they feel that addiction coerces ongoing bad choices
<p>“The campaign is proudly a partnership approach in recognition of the mutuality and interdependence between all people.” (p4)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uniting’s policy statements specifically IGNORE the interdependence between all people by pretending drug use is an individualist phenomenon, downplayed as essentially affecting nobody, hardly even the user. Uniting specifically denies the Judeo-Christian notion that no man is an island
<p>“The campaign also seeks to promote the active participation of those affected by the injustice of our drug laws, by giving voice to those with lived experience.” (p 4)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uniting narrowly focuses on the self-inflicted misery of the drug user (their choice), elevating it above the broader misery inflicted on a whole constellation of people – partners, children, parents, siblings, friends and the community (not their choice). This is misplaced compassion

	<p>2. Drug Free Australia's concern is for the impact on families when drugs become part of their lives. Because of over 35 years of Harm Minimisation, where Prevention and Demand Reduction has largely been ignored, intergenerational drug use is now common in families. This leads, in turn, to unprecedented levels of child abuse and neglect, young people unable to reach their full potential and poor role models in parents and significant others.</p>
<p>“Uniting believes in a fair go for everyone, but especially for those that are vulnerable.” (p 4)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child contains the right to be free from illicit drugs precisely because there are many who are more vulnerable to the harms wrought by drug use and users 2. On every available metric, decriminalising drugs predominantly increases drug use in under 25 year olds, whose developing brains are more vulnerable to long-term damage 3. FAIR? Is it fair that drugs cause road accidents which harm more than the occupants of a drug users vehicle? Is it fair that drugs in the workplace cause harms to more workers than the individual drug user? Is it fair that a user inflict harms on a whole constellation of people close to them?
<p>“The stigma that has too long attached to people who live with drug dependency has discouraged many from having the open and honest conversation about their drug use that might have pointed them towards treatment.”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uniting appears to support the LGBTQI+ movement which seeks to stigmatise or even cancel those not supporting its aims, while condemning those not supporting the harms (where harm reduction is an industry) of drug use
<p>“Yet the word ‘decriminalisation’ remains a misunderstood term, often conflated with the concept of legalisation, and often used by some of our media to drive an agenda based on fear, not facts” (p 4)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is the drug users themselves that think decriminalisation allows them to legally use drugs recreationally – 43% of users in ACT thought cannabis was now legal when the ACT decriminalised cannabis. If users and media make the same mistake the problem is with decriminalisation as a policy simply because it invites misinterpretation

	<p>2. Uniting’s approach to decriminalisation is, practically-speaking, drug legalisation by another name (despite their protestations otherwise) in that any laws around illicit drug use will have no meaningful limits or deterrent value. It will give all appearances of sanctioning drug use</p>
<p>“We ask questions like: What should happen when someone is found with small quantities of psychoactive substances? Should the same thing happen to everyone? What about the person supplying these substances?” (p 4)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is a fact that drug users often fund their own habit by lower level dealing, where the law already distinguished between higher level and lower level drug dealers. Both low and high-level dealers are part of the same problem 2. Small quantities are carried by drug user/dealers precisely because there are larger penalties for higher level dealing, successfully limiting the number of people that can be harmed by low level dealing
<p>“The 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey showed that there continues to be strong public support among Australians for measures amounting to the removal of criminal sanctions for possession for personal use of all prohibited drugs” (p 6)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The cited Survey asks only about support for the decriminalisation of cannabis, not of heroin, amphetamines, cocaine or ecstasy. Uniting seeks to position “referral to treatment or education” as support for decriminalisation when the question does not stipulate ‘with a conviction’ or ‘with no conviction’
<p>“Only a small proportion of people who use drugs experience drug dependency (i.e. use that causes social, financial, psychological or physical problems).” (p 7)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possibly Australia’s most prolific researcher on heroin use, Prof. Shane Darke, said in The Conversation in 2014, “The typical picture of an active heroin user is a dependent, long-term unemployed person, with a long history of treatment and relapse, and a history of imprisonment. Heroin is simply not the sort of drug that could be termed recreational because very few people use it in non-dependent, non-compulsive fashion.” 61% of Sydney injecting room clients are on social security (see p 70) and 10% involved in sex work (see p 15), dispelling the myth of the functional drug user 2. Drug dependency is not the only vexing issue with drug use - for instance, 29% of ecstasy deaths within Australia are from car accidents

	<p>which endanger the lives of the driver, occupants and those in other vehicles</p> <p>3. Using United’s logic, those drivers who speed on our roads without causing loss of life should not be penalised for their speeding. The law does not work that way with speeding or with drug use</p>
<p>“Existing drug laws create unnecessary barriers, stopping people getting into treatment, increasing social stigma and heightening the isolation among those who need support.” (p 7)</p>	<p>1. To the contrary, Australia has a government-sanctioned Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) which has reach into most drug user networks. Syringe programs also boast an extensive reach.</p>
<p>“By responding with law and order rather than treatment and support, society is punishing people rather than trying to help.” (p 7)</p>	<p>1. Uniting’s false dichotomy between ‘law and order’ and ‘treatment and support’ is contradicted by the success of Sweden which had Europe’s highest drug use in the 1960s but the lowest by the 1990s using mandatory rehab, which coalesces treatment with court inducement</p>
<p>“Treatment works. By refocusing the system on helping people, lives can be saved, money can be saved, and law enforcement resources can be redirected.” (p 7)</p> <p>“ . . . because the act of removing currently-existing sanctions could send a signal that drug use is now permissible. The experience of countries that have decriminalised use/possession is that this does not occur (see, for example, the discussion of Portugal in section 3 ahead).” (p 12)</p>	<p>1. Uniting is referencing here the failed Portugal model where law enforcement funds were redirected into treatment. Portugal’s drug use rose 59% in 16 years, drug deaths increased by 59% and use by high school minors increased 60%. Australia’s Tough on Drugs prevention approach between 1998 and 2007 saw a 42% decrease in drug use (p 8) and a 75% decrease in overdose deaths (p 8).</p> <p>2. Increased drug use means more treatment, more mental health issues, more school drop outs, more workplace accidents, more abuse and neglect of children, as well as increased family violence and dysfunction.</p>
<p>“ . . .many schemes only withhold criminal sanctions for the first few occasions a person is found in possession. This is presumably on the grounds that if a person is repeatedly found in possession, after having been provided with an alternative and a more lenient response, then it is appropriate for the full force of the criminal law to operate.” (p 11)</p>	<p>1. Uniting’s assertion that repeated violations of drug laws should not eventually attract a criminal penalty wrongly assumes that addiction is a disease, like leukemia, which may or may not be reversed. Rather addiction is clearly a psycho-social issue where the choices of a drug user, albeit at times psychologically constrained by their</p>

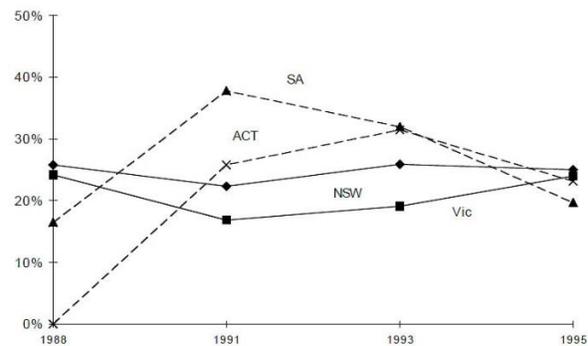
<p>Uniting calls for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No limit on the number of referrals (to treatment or education) a person may receive • No civil sanctions for non-compliance.” (p 13) 	<p>addiction, are paramount</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Stripping meaningful consequences for repeated illicit drug use entails a quasi-legalisation drug policy model simply because Uniting argues against even coerced treatment or rehab. In this regime, the drug user controls Australian drug policy 3. The 2019 NDSH Survey indicates 99% of Australians do not give their approval to the use of heroin, speed and ice, with cocaine (97%), ecstasy (96%) and cannabis (80%) indicating that Australians would rather live without drug use. Australians clearly want LESS drug use, not more, whereas Uniting’s approach will only create more drug use, as has happened with decriminalisation regimes before
<p>“A second rationale appears to be that removing criminal sanctions itself has risks. This may be either because criminal sanctions are presumed to be an effective and appropriate deterrent, or because the act of removing currently-existing sanctions could send a signal that drug use is now permissible.” (p 12)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. According to the 2019 NDS Household Survey 73% of Australians say they have no interest in ever trying drugs. 32% of Australians say they will not try drugs because of their illegality – that means that drug laws are working nicely. 10% of Australians who have never used cannabis would try it for the first time if made legal, while another 3% of users would have it more often. Illegality as deterrence is demonstrably evidenced
<p>“Given the fact that 43.2% of people over the age of 14 have used drugs in their lifetime (with 16.4% in the past year), taking no action is a credible option, at least for the vast majority of people who use drugs and are not dependent.” (p 13)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The statistics do not support Uniting’s assertion. The very same 2019 survey they cite shows that 96-99% of Australians do not give their approval to the regular use of heroin, ice, speed, cocaine or ecstasy, with 80% not giving their approval to regular cannabis use. This means that 62%, the majority of past illicit drug users, agree on their futility and harm and no longer use them. Australian disapproval of drugs indicates they would prefer users not use drugs
<p>“There has been no major increase in drug use in Portugal in the nearly two decades since criminal penalties were removed, while rates of problematic use and use by adolescents has fallen, as have rates of drug-related deaths. Outcomes have also</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who has misled Uniting with these egregiously false statements about Portugal? Portugal surveys their drug use every 5 years

improved, with fewer people appearing before the courts, increased rates of people receiving drug treatment, and reduced social costs of drug misuse.” (p 16)

- use increased between 2001 and 2017 by 59%, an alarming increase
- overdose deaths increased 59%
- use by high school minors rose 60%
- overdose deaths increasing by 59% indicates opiate use has increased by roughly the same percentage – so problematic use demonstrably increased
- when drug use is no longer a crime there is no need for courts or appearances - but that doesn't stop the increased harm from increased drug use
- social costs of drug use obviously rose with increased use and deaths
- see Drug Free Australia's document on Portugal with all the [official data](#)

2. If Uniting is trying to infer decriminalisation does not increase drug use elsewhere, here are Australia's own statistics of huge initial increases for SA (1987) and the ACT (1992) from a level of negligible baseline use ([p 53](#)), finally settling at the same levels as NSW and Victoria, which already had entrenched criminal networks selling cannabis

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

[The same](#) happened in all US States that decriminalised as well as the Netherlands where virtual decriminalisation was pursued. WA decriminalised cannabis and then recriminalised recognising the damage cannabis was doing

“However, we would hope and expect that decriminalisation would mean better access to help for parents whose drug dependency is impacting their parenting.” (p 17)

3. The evidence is in, and Uniting is ignoring that **the diversion of policing resources to ‘treatment’ in Portugal only led to increased use of the most dangerous drugs along with**

	<p>increases in overdose deaths. Australia's Tough on Drugs prevention approach 1998-2007 saw a 42% decrease in drug use (p 8) and a 75% decrease in overdose deaths (p 8). Children were the winners with these positive impacts.</p>
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MISGUIDED ASSERTIONS

Uniting Church statements	Drug Free Australia response
<p>"For those who do not develop drug dependency, the current reliance on criminal sanctions puts at risk careers and opportunities." (p 7)</p>	<p>1. Uniting ignores the fact that drug users who don't develop a debilitating dependency are often the agents promoting their drug use to others who will develop a debilitating dependency. They are part of the problem and have historically been treated as such</p>
<p>"We believe that, among other things, good laws generally display the following characteristics: transparency, equity, focus and proportionality. Uniting proposes these principles should be applied to the legislation governing the possession and personal use of illegal drugs in NSW and the ACT. In fact, to not do so would, in our view, be an abrogation of good public policy making." (p 8)</p>	<p>1. These 'principles' are based on the misleading premise that 'drugs will always be here, so laws should be focused on reducing harm, rather than reducing and preventing initial use'. A more balanced approach is the alternative as laid out by Drug Policy Futures. Of particular note are principles 4 and 5 of their listed Principles</p>
<p>"The principle of equity supports the decriminalisation of the personal use of all prohibited drugs" (p 12)</p>	<p>1. And unfortunately for Uniting, the same principle of Equity historically led to all illicit drug use being criminalised. They cannot therefore complain if cannabis use was treated as severely as heroin use</p>
<p>"Drug dependency generally is a symptom of underlying vulnerability and disadvantage, and therefore sanctions like fines and community service are likely to exacerbate that disadvantage." (p 15)</p>	<p>1. This is a naïve statement and omits the fact that many who possess small quantities of drugs are actually in a network of people selling drugs to make money, only keeping small amounts in possession to pretend its for personal use. Taking away the ability to</p>

	<p>confiscate and the deterrent of possible civil sanctions will allow these business-people to flourish and increase in numbers.</p>
<p>“The question is, in a decriminalised system where there are no criminal sanctions for possession/use on its own, should possession/use remain an aggravating factor when other crimes are charged?” (p 17)</p>	<p>1. In cases where drug induced violence, particularly due to cannabis or ice is concerned, the causality of an addiction should not go without penalty or coerced rehab.</p>
<p>“The more serious a person’s drug dependency, the more likely it will be that their use does not exist in isolation, but is a symptom of deeper social and psychological issues or part of a reinforcing complex of structural vulnerabilities. Therefore, people with drug dependency may have difficulty making good decisions about their own long-term best interests and compounding this by adding fines or orders for non-compliance helps no one.” (p 15)</p>	<p>1. This kind of thinking comes from the same George Soros-funded irrationality that seeks to empty prisons of people doing real crimes. The fact is that the harms done by drug use to families and community are a crime, and must be treated as such with penalties and coerced rehab.</p>
<p>“A staged approach would probably be required, starting with the removal of criminal sanctions for possession/use under the threshold quantity, and the gradual replacement of threshold quantities with other criteria for determining supply/trafficking in due course.”</p>	<p>1. Uniting again ignores the fact that traffickers of large quantities of drugs use syndicates of individual 'pushers or mules' so that, if caught, they claim 'possession for personal use'.</p>