



Annual Review 2024-25

Who we are:

Drug Free Australia (DFA) was established over 2 decades ago. From the outset its mission has been to represent a strong and informed 'community voice' as a peak body that value s and promotes the good health and wellbeing of all people in our communities. We work together with Australian and global community networks to share the latest research findings via website, email, e-bulletin, community presentations, zoom and social media.

DFA was officially Formed in 2002 from a grassroots community base of concerned parents, medical practitioners, educational and law enforcement professionals. We have built an affiliate base comprising more than 2000 organizations and individuals. [https://drugfree.org.au/images/pdf-files/linked-pdf/Affiliates-2016\(0719\).pdf](https://drugfree.org.au/images/pdf-files/linked-pdf/Affiliates-2016(0719).pdf)

We communicate with community leaders, youth groups and politicians at all levels of government. This year we have continued to build relationships within federal and state governments via letters and submissions. Topics such as the harms of an unprecedented increase in vaping and the trends towards legalizing or decriminalizing cannabis and other drugs remains have a priority.

On 4 October this year our President, for over 20 years, Major Brian Watters AO passed away after an extended illness. As a tribute to his unwavering effort in drug prevention we have established the '**Major Brian Watters Youth Prevention Influencers' Award**. This will give young people the opportunity to share their ideas on how and why we need to work towards drug prevention. It is hoped that some of these youth will travel to Vienna in March each year to join others in speaking to governments and health officials about the importance of drug prevention. This will be done in partnership with the Rotary Action Group for Addiction Prevention.



Major Brian Watters AO – 2 April 1935 – 4 October 2025

Overview from the President - *Gary Christian*



Introducing Drug Free Australia's new President, Gary Christian. His profile can be located at: <https://drugfree.org.au/drug-free-australia-committee-members/>

Gary reports that DFA has had an extremely busy and successful year. We have grown our supporter base exponentially because of our close ties and affiliations both nationally and internationally., we h ave been able to present to two international conferences, our links with the United Nations and grassroots non-government organizations have strengthened.

Without the support of MTAS, none of our effort could be shared as widely. We are grateful for the trust that goes with the funding provided and will continue to strive for more support in the Prevention space.

This year, I particularly want to thank our long-standing Board Members on their efforts to get this message out into communities throughout Australia. Our monthly e-bulletins, as well as our continued partnership with Rotary has enabled much of our prevention message to expand beyond our borders.

There has also been an increase in our global contacts with:

- 'One Voice, One Message' (OVOM) based in the Netherlands, where I am honored to represent DFA on the Board as Scientific Director.
- Herschel Baker, DFA's International Liaison Director has also continued to make regular contact with political leaders in Australia and globally. increased our global communications, particularly with the United States.
- He, together with Executive Director, Jo Baxter is also an International Board member of the Rotary Action Group for Addiction Prevention.
- Added to this DFA has been actively engaged in the World Federation Against Drugs, with Jo Baxter being represented on the board for the Oceania division.
- Regular links with Bob McCoskrie and his most recent YouTube critique on New Zealand's soft drug policy – (which has many parallels with Australia's Harm Minimisation policy approach. This recent presentation covers MANY areas of concern: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8R6e7zuxSw>

The work of Dr Stuart Reece, a Fellow of Drug Free Australia and Professor Gary Hulse is now being acknowledged internationally with regard to genotoxicity of cannabis and its negative inter-generational impacts on families. The research has also been acknowledged and published in several medical journals worldwide. We are also extremely grateful to the research being done by Dr Ross Colquhoun

Our continued focus on education with the addition of an increasing uptake of our social media platforms has continued.

In our e-bulletins we promote prevention education in schools including the DAESY program, Teen Challenge, No Brainer, Drug Free Kids and our own *Save Your Brain* online website portal, geared to primary, middle and senior school students and their families. We have added 'Kerryn's Korner', a feature of the e-bulletin that shares her insightful and 'lived experience. We continue to strive to find ways to gain additional resources to push-back against this unhealthy and extremely dangerous movement that claims the lives (and lifestyles) of our children and their families. Our regular blogs on the 'Save Your Brain' website reach out to families and are being well received. [Blog | Save Your Brain](#)



Key Achievements (KA):

KA 1 - Towards Healthier Schools Project Update

For the past EIGHT years, Drug Free Australia's 'Towards Healthier School Communities' Project has been aiming to build more prevention-focussed content into schools' Health and Physical Education programs. The aim being to reduce demand for drugs in the youth population.

Through the project we have been able to both promote and financially support some of the programs that DFA has researched as being those that focus on 'prevention of drug use' as a priority. We do this through direct financial sponsorship of some programs in order to give schools a 'taster' of what is being offered in their schools. This has proved successful with many schools opting for repeat sessions. In addition, these programs are promoted in our monthly E- Bulletin that reaches over 2000 recipients.

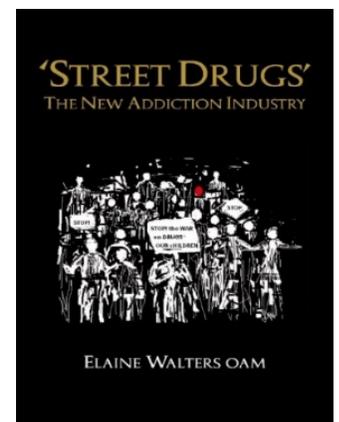
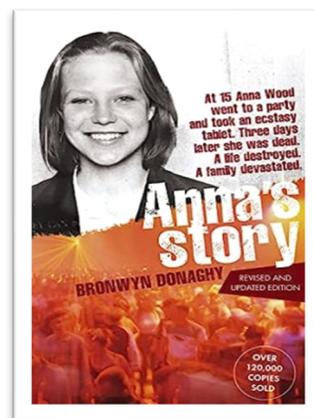
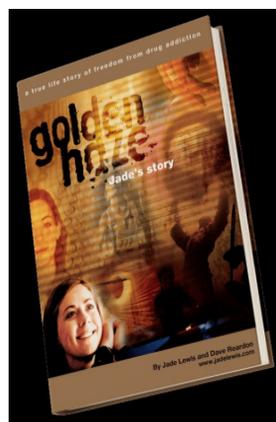
President Gary presented to two forums in Melbourne in October, in partnership with the Taskforce for Drug Prevention, one being a Youth Forum and the other to the wider community. DFA provided sponsorship in terms of assisting with accommodation and transport for the overseas speaker.

The following programs and resources that have been promoted both in the **E-bulletin** and on our **SaveYourBrain** website include:

- The DAESY program, which follows up with the offer of books by Kerryn Redpath which describe her early experience with drugs and the lessons to be passed on to young people
- *WCTU's Drug Free Kids program,*
- *Dalgarno's 'No Brainer' resources, AND Unnecessary Harm podcasts*
- SideEffect – a program delivered in Western Australia aimed at giving teens strategies to avoid drug use AND ...

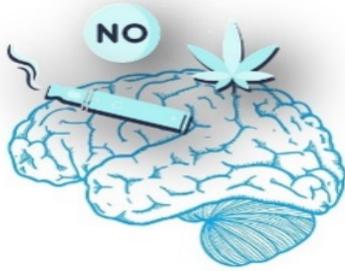
DFA has also continued to promote books such as:

- **'Chasing After the Wind'**, by Kerryn Redpath has touched many hearts and saved countless lives. Kerryn receives regular feedback following her school presentations.
- **'Golden Haze'**, the story of **Jade Lewis** and her encounter with drugs in her teens, that robbed her of her chances to become an Olympic Sprinter
- **'Anna's Story'**, where 15 year old Anna died of ONE ecstasy pill at a Rave party, due to an allergic reaction to MDMA
- **Street Drugs, The New Addiction Industry'** and its circulation to communities, school libraries and health centres via Rotary Clubs is being well received.



We are pleased to report that our [SaveYourBrain website](#) continues to receive positive feedback. Teachers like flexibility so that they can choose aspects that match their class needs. They particularly find the vaping information in Module 6 very helpful.

[7 & 8 Module Six | Save Your Brain](#)



The modules are aligned with the Australian Curriculum, where appropriate.

We are particularly pleased to report that the Drug Free Australia website has undergone an extensive upgrade this year. In particular the Resources portal is an invaluable resource for schools and community groups;

<https://drugfree.org.au/dfa-resource-library/>

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

Towards Healthier Schools Project – Phase 9 goals are to:

1. Continue, to regularly update Save *Your Brain modules for Year levels 5-12*. This will ensure that the resource remains relevant. We want to add zoom sessions to support schools and our [Youth Prevention Influencers](#) to help them more effectively navigate the website for their individual student, parent and wider community cohorts.
2. Expand the offering of book resources to schools, particularly those mentioned above. We find that teachers and libraries are always looking for new resources. With Rotary on board, we hope to do this at a lower cost and supported effort.
3. Continue to promote culturally sensitive drug prevention education to rural and remote communities. While the online pedagogy is very suitable for this target group, it is also important to provide hard copy, for those who have little access to reliable internet. Through RAG AP, we now have access to several First Nations school communities, particularly in South Australia.
4. Continue to subsidise NEW schools that seek to trial prevention focused Alcohol and Drug Education, using our Preferred Providers.
5. Consolidate ongoing feedback and evaluation.
 - Students, under teacher's guidance are invited to send in additional role plays/scenarios:
For example: Students invited to send in videos or written scenarios (real or imagined) where they have been challenged or bullied into doing something they are uncomfortable with.
 - They include a solution as to how they navigated out of the situation. Some may to an alternative ending, where they go down the path of succumbing to peer pressure and describe the possible negative outcome.
 - Changes will be made to modules, based on the feedback and material supplied.

KA 2 - Website development and expansion - www.drugfree.org.au

The Drug Free Australia website was upgraded and continued to have current material added during 2024-25 thanks to the initiatives and sponsorship from Board Member, Herschel Baker. People appear to be using both this and the Save Your Brain site simultaneously, for educational research, as they are linked.

In addition, Drug Free Australia has produced a YouTube Series on decriminalisation at: [Drug Free Australia - YouTube](#)

The e-bulletins are circulated to at least 2000 recipients and are placed on the website at <https://drugfree.org.au/newsletter-listing/>

KA 3 - Government Submissions, Meetings and Briefs

As mentioned in the President's report, DFA has continued to be proactive in sending correspondence and evidence-based information to both state and Federal parliaments on matters of concern. Numerous formal submissions on key issues have been made through the combined efforts of Gary Christian, Herschel Baker, and Ross Colquhoun, backed by evidence-based references. Topics have included:

- the weakening of the deterrent to use drugs by young people, by removing penalties for the first 2-3 warnings.
- 'Medicinal cannabis'; science related to the harms of cannabis including at least 27 cancers; cannabis and driving – the dangers; cannabis products, including food.
- Cannabis and Driving. Some of these subjects have been covered in two or more submissions.
- The Therapeutic Goods Administration continues to be called to account for their lack of transparency in policy and regulation.
- Mr Christian has also sent regular parliamentary briefs on key issues – particularly the failure of Harm Reduction only policies.
- Gary Christian attended and presented a session at the Addiction Z Conference in Queensland and internationally at the CND and in the Netherlands

KA 4 - Media liaison

On a regular basis, DFA has been both proactive and reactive in the media this year. We have concentrated on social media rather than mainstream, because the uptake is not cost effective. To gain any measure of uptake, including advertising aspect is beyond our budget. We have also utilised YouTube extensively, with a range of topics and interviews, as well as engagement in podcasts via Drug Free America and Dalgarno.

Major topics continue to include:

- Vaping,
- Medical Marijuana and driving,
- Pill Testing,
- Cannabis Legalisation (including push for increased use of hemp and CBD products);
- Decriminalisation and legalisation of other illicit drugs.



KA 5 - Research via Expert Advisers and DFA Fellows

We have continued to work closely with Dr Stuart Reece and Prof Gary Hulse in their research on cannabis harms and were able to notify the media and communities about the findings, which are quite disturbing. This work will continue in years to come. DFA has published regular to all politicians in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Federally to give them prior knowledge of upcoming trends being pushed by the drug legalization lobbies. Gary Christian has taken the lead in providing research to public inquiries and to presenting to political and community audiences. Jo Baxter has made regular presentations to Rotary Clubs in South Australia, NSW and Victoria on topics including vaping, medicinal cannabis and the Rotary Action Group – Addiction Prevention.

KA 6 - Australian and International liaison to update research.

Internationally, DFA continues to be involved in the World Federation Against Drugs, with Jo Baxter being elected to their Board for the next two years. This combines well with her regular interaction with the global Rotary Action Group – Addiction Prevention. Kerry Redpath presented at an Indigenous Conference in Queensland, sharing her ‘lived experience’ and provided much needed advice to vulnerable groups, both from indigenous communities and to AOD workers who service them.

DFA remains an active member of the Taskforce 4 Drug Prevention comprising DFA, DACA/Touchstone, Dalgarno, WCTU and Teen Challenge Tasmania. The plan is to develop combined projects that will have more political influence in some areas, than singular bodies. We also retain membership of the One Voice, One Message – supporting communities for a drug free lifestyle. Gary Christian has the role of Science Director and Jo Baxter has supported the Administration and Prevention Committee.

