

Media Release

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DECRIMINALISATION WELCOMED

Directions Health Services welcomes the passage today of the *Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Bill* which prioritises harm minimisation by decriminalising small amounts of illicit drugs.

“The ACT is once again leading the way in ensuring a ‘health-first’ approach to drug use by taking steps which will have a significantly positive impact on the wellbeing of individuals and our community,” Directions Health Services CEO, Bronwyn Hendry said.

Criminalising drug use does not reduce drug use. Directions Health has advocated for decriminalisation of personal illicit drug use for a range of reasons. In particular, because evidence shows decriminalisation will reduce stigma and result in more people seeking treatment. Currently only a small portion of people with problematic drug use receive the assistance they need.

“Decriminalisation results in early intervention and diversion into treatment for those people who would benefit from that, rather than a criminal record and even jail time. Taking an evidence-based, health-first approach benefits every member of our community by reducing criminal recidivism; improving health, wellbeing and life outcomes for individuals and families; significantly reducing costs associated with the judicial process and incarceration; and reducing participants’ future reliance on welfare and service supports,” Ms Hendry said.

“We commend the Government for having the conviction to support decriminalisation.”

Under this legislation small amounts of the most commonly used and best understood illicit drugs will be decriminalised by introducing a simple drug offence notice (SDON). Police will retain discretion to respond to the circumstances of specific situations but will now be able to issue a fine or divert drug users at the first point of contact to appropriate services and avert prosecution. We support the 12 months’ time frame proposed to ensure adequate preparation and successful implementation. However, it is critical Canberrans understand the change will not come into effect until October 2023.

Current penalties for manufacture, supply, trafficking and driving under the influence of drugs will remain unchanged.

“Importantly, a person would not have a criminal record simply for personal use or possession of small quantities of illegal substances and have their ability to retain or gain future employment or participate in community activities negatively impacted” Ms Hendry said.

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