

# FAIR TREATMENT

Partnership for drug law and policy reform

[fairtreatment.org](http://fairtreatment.org)

*We all want to live in a world  
where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, including people who use drugs,  
where we have drug laws informed by best practice and evidence  
and where treatment is available for all those who seek it.  
It's time for our political leaders to set aside their ideology, listen to the evidence,  
and modernise our laws.*

## The campaign

Fair Treatment is a public advocacy campaign led by Uniting NSW.ACT (part of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW-ACT). It's a partnership of 60+ non-government, not-for-profit organisations.

***Fair Treatment supports a more honest, open conversation about alcohol and other drugs.***

In Australia, our attitudes and laws around alcohol and other drugs are based more on politics than common sense. Ending all personal use is an unrealistic drug policy goal. Many people, from all walks of life, use prohibited substances and lead otherwise normal lives.

The sensationalist media shames and dehumanises people who use drugs, and outdated policy approaches prevent people from being honest about their experiences of use. This can discourage some people who need help from seeking it, because they feel rejected and alone and fear legal consequences.

Indeed, for people who do have issues with use of alcohol or other drugs, their dependence on these substances often has more to do with other challenges they face in life - such as violence, abuse, mental health issues, family, relationship or financial pressures. For these people, drug use is an imperfect solution to their pain.

***In these situations, our role as a community is to help people find better solutions, not add further judgement and shame.***

Current NSW and ACT government approaches have fallen out of step with worldwide research and best-practice public health and legal policy. In addition, the majority of our community now supports more effective, compassionate responses to personal drug use.

***It's time to rethink our approach and develop evidence-based solutions more in line with community values.***

Fair Treatment supports sensible measures to reform drug laws, policy and practice that will provide better solutions for individuals and their families - particularly young people and those from First Nations communities - by treating personal drug dependence as a health and social issue.

***We support:***

- ***increased investment in evidence-based treatment strategies, particularly in regional areas; and***
- ***replacing the legal response for personal drug use with a health and welfare approach.***

## Background and history

In early 2016 Uniting Church members approached Uniting's Social Justice Forum (SJF) with personal stories suggesting current policing approaches were deterring people with drug dependency from seeking treatment.

The SJF, working closely with expert staff of Uniting's Medically Supervised Injecting Centre, framed a resolution that was adopted by the Church's NSW-ACT Synod in 2016, calling for a public advocacy campaign in support of decriminalising (removing criminal penalties for) personal possession and use of small amounts of illicit drugs, and better resourcing of treatment.

To date, Fair Treatment has:

- Engaged with police, politicians, media, legal sector and the affected communities
- Partnered to conduct the Canberra Drug Policy Series
- Held high profile events including ones with Sir Richard Branson, Johan Hari and Manuel Cardoso
- Organised motions before NSW Parliament
- Organised the Long Walk to Treatment from Dubbo to Sydney
- Premiered our documentary *Half a Million Steps* and organised many community screenings
- Prepared a discussion paper on decriminalisation
- Conducted activist training



## Case in point: Portugal

At least 25 countries have removed criminal penalties for personal possession of some or all drugs. A longstanding example of reform is Portugal – which in 2001, adopted reforms to remove penalties for personal drug use and adopt a more health-centred approach including improved treatment options. After almost 20 years, research shows key improvements, including:

- Drug-related deaths and HIV infections have declined
- Drug use has fallen among those aged 15-24, and overall drug use has not increased
- Rates of dependency and injecting drug use have decreased
- The drug-related prison population has declined and the burden on the criminal justice system eased

## How you can get involved

- **Visit [fairtreatment.org](http://fairtreatment.org) to:**
  - Pledge your support
  - Join a local action team
  - Share your story
  - Organise a screening of our documentary, *Half a Million Steps*
- **Like our Facebook page ([facebook.com/fairtreatmentau](https://facebook.com/fairtreatmentau)) and share our content**
- **Talk about the issue with a friend, colleague or family member**

## Further information and contact

Email [advocacy@uniting.org](mailto:advocacy@uniting.org) or visit our website: [www.fairtreatment.org](http://www.fairtreatment.org)