

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Church welcomes much-needed \$500m response to Ice Inquiry**

In announcing its response to the Ice Inquiry, the NSW Government has ignored key expert evidence about how to end the ice epidemic, unable to get the much-needed reforms through its own cabinet.

Uniting NSW.ACT General Manager Advocacy and External Relations Emma Maiden welcomed the response but emphasised that further action is desperately needed.

“The announcement of \$358million for increased treatment, particularly in rural and regional areas, is a welcome relief,” Ms Maiden said.

“This is a key element of the Fair Treatment campaign Uniting leads and we welcome the Government’s delayed acceptance of the need for a dramatic increase in treatment funding.

“It is tragic that hundreds of thousands of people have been turned away from health services for alcohol and drug problems since the Ice Inquiry report was handed down. This has been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID pandemic.

“With the Government’s response taking 30 months, it is imperative the Government moves quickly to implement this announcement. Time is of the essence.”

Ms Maiden said the NSW Government announcement on increased diversion is also welcomed.

“The Ice Inquiry’s recommendations could not have been clearer. The current policing-based approach to drug use is not working. We need diversion, at the very least, to save lives and connect people to treatment when they seek it,” Ms Maiden said.

“The announcement on diversion is only in principle, has \$400 fines and only offers two chances to change behaviour. That risks excluding the people with more serious drug dependency and who will benefit most from a non-policing approach to their behaviour.”

“A large part of the reason why people with drug dependency don’t reach out for help sooner is because of the criminal consequences of drug use. It’s also the reason people don’t tend to disclose their drug use to family, friends, or health professionals. This is why a better diversion approach is needed.”

The Ice Inquiry cost over \$10 million and the final report had over 1300 pages and 109 recommendations. The public told their stories to the Inquiry all over NSW, including in Lismore, Nowra, Dubbo, East Maitland, Broken Hill and Moree.

The police submission to the inquiry supported diversion.

The community similarly supports non-criminal responses to personal drug use. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey shows 78 per cent of Australians support this.

“Close to our heart is that people be treated with dignity and respect, including people who use drugs,” the Moderator of the Uniting Church (NSW and ACT), the Rev. Simon Hansford, said.

“Our drug laws are based on stigmatising and outdated ideas, not modern medical facts, and evidence. People who experience drug dependency are shamed and dehumanised when they should be offered life-saving connection.

“We need to have a more honest, open and ongoing conversation about alcohol and other drugs. Our current laws create harm by driving people away from seeking and finding the support they need.”

Uniting NSW.ACT is the social justice and welfare arm of the Uniting Church and has spearheaded the Fair Treatment campaign for fairer drug laws and has been arguing for increased treatment services, particularly in rural and regional areas, for over four years.

It’s been over 30 months since the Government’s own Ice Inquiry handed down its Report. The following recommendations from the Special Inquiry into Ice have been rejected by the NSW Government, with little evidence to back up the decision.

- Decriminalisation
- Allow more medically supervised drug consumption rooms
- Pill testing
- Stopping drug detection dogs at music festivals
- Prison drug health programs and needle exchange

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#### **About Uniting | [uniting.org](https://uniting.org)**

Uniting is the community service and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT. We provide aged care, early learning, disability, child, youth and family services. We support many people experiencing isolation, poor health and social and economic disadvantage including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal people and people living in rural and remote areas.