



Hon. Jeremy Buckingham MLC  
Chair  
Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance  
Parliament of New South Wales  
via: [portfoliocommittee1@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:portfoliocommittee1@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr. Buckingham,

**Uniting NSW.ACT submission: Inquiry into the impact of the regulatory framework for cannabis in New South Wales**

Uniting NSW.ACT appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the impact of the regulatory framework for cannabis in New South Wales. Our submission includes Uniting's discussion paper: *Possession and use of drugs: Options for changing the law*, which explores why we support the decriminalisation of personal use and possession of all drugs, our preferred model, and how this could work in practice.

Uniting contributes to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through advocacy, community services and spiritual care. Uniting provides services for people through all ages and stages of life, and drives solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives.

Uniting leads the Fair Treatment campaign, advocating for the decriminalisation of personal use and possession of all drugs and an increased investment in treatment. In other words, our campaign supports the removal of criminal penalties for the possession of drugs for personal use and equitable access to treatment for everyone who seeks it. The Fair Treatment campaign came about after a resolution was passed at a meeting of the Uniting Church Synod of NSW/ACT in 2016, giving license for its service arm, Uniting NSW.ACT, to lead a campaign for drug law reform.

In addition, our operation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in Kings Cross over the last 23 years has shown the positive result of a health-based approach to drug use. MSIC offers a safer environment for injecting drug users, and has supervised over 1.29 million injections, managed over 11,000 overdoses without a single death, and made more than 22,000 referrals into to treatment and care.

Through MSIC and our Fair Treatment campaign, Uniting has significant interest in reforming laws to ensure a health-based approach to drug use and dependency, and better outcomes for people and communities.

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As our discussion paper underscores, most people who use drugs lead ordinary lives. The current reliance on criminal sanctions can have long lasting negative impacts on careers and other life opportunities. Drug dependency affects only a minority of people who use drugs, manifesting in social, financial, psychological, or physical problems. For individuals who do develop drug dependency, the current approach erects barriers to accessing help and support. Existing drug laws create unnecessary obstacles, hindering people from seeking treatment, amplifying social stigma, and exacerbating the isolation felt by those who might benefit from connection.

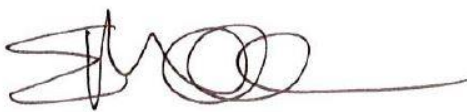
When society responds to drug issues primarily with law enforcement rather than treatment and support, it essentially punishes individuals instead of offering genuine assistance. It is important to recognise that drug dependency often arises from complex social circumstances, disadvantage, and trauma. Therefore, responses to harmful drug use and addiction should address these underlying causes and refrain from blaming the individual.

It is well-established that treatment and harm reduction is effective. By shifting the focus of the system towards providing these services, lives can be saved, costs can be reduced, and law enforcement resources can be reallocated.

The current punitive drug laws in New South Wales have notable negative impacts and fall short in effectively addressing the multifaceted issues related to drug use. An alternative, health-based and social welfare approach offers a more compassionate and effective path forward, emphasising harm reduction, reallocation of resources, and social inclusion.

Uniting urges the inquiry to consider these benefits and recommend a shift towards a more health-focused regulatory framework for cannabis and other drugs in New South Wales. If Uniting can assist the Committee's work any further, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Maiden', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Emma Maiden**  
General Manager Advocacy and External Relations  
Uniting NSW.ACT