

## RECENT ADVANCES IN DRUG LAW REFORM

### Authors:

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### Background/Purpose:

In 2015, Victoria's Legislative Council (through the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee) established an "inquiry into illicit and synthetic drugs and prescription medication." It was later renamed the "Inquiry into Drug Law Reform" with a revised Terms of Reference (TOR). The inquiry aimed to: a) assess the effectiveness of current laws and regulations relating to illicit drug use in the State of Victoria; and b) investigate regulatory approaches in other jurisdictions (interstate and international) that have resulted in a reduction in drug-related harms and how these might be adopted in Victoria.

### Approach:

The inquiry called for submissions addressing the TOR. Committee members undertook site visits in several international jurisdictions, speaking with health and social services, law enforcement and legal experts on impacts of positive reforms. Public hearings were held with experts, organisations and individuals.

### Outcomes/Impact:

The committee received a total of 231 submissions and heard evidence from 85 representatives from 43 Australian organisations and two individuals. Jurisdictions visited included New South Wales, Switzerland; Portugal; United Kingdom; Vancouver, Canada; Colorado and California, USA; and New Zealand (more than 150 representatives from 52 institutions).

A final report was tabled in the parliament in March 2018, comprising 50 recommendations, including subsidising dispensing fees for pharmacotherapy, removing restrictions on peer-distribution of clean injecting equipment, improving patient access to medicinal cannabis and a focus on reducing stigma for people who use and inject drugs.

### Innovation and Significance:

- The final report provides Victoria (and potentially other Australian jurisdictions) a roadmap for pragmatic, evidence-informed drug law reform.
- The process demonstrates how MPs can work across party lines and construct policy responses that prioritises evidence over popularism.
- Whether there is political will to enact these recommended reforms is to be determined, and unlikely to be known until after the November state election.

### Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No relevant disclosures.