

Submission

No 41

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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• preventing drug problems •

**Submission from the Australian Drug Foundation
to the
Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on
Children and Young People's
Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 years in NSW**

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1.0 Overview

The Australian Drug Foundation welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. Ensuring that children and young people have the best start in life is a sound investment in the future of our community.

This submission will focus on issues relevant to the prevention of problematic drug use in the community. There is now a good understanding of the factors at play which contribute to the risk of developing problematic drug use and those which help protect against it.

Parental influence and how best to support and resource parents is a key issue which the ADF is involved in. A number of relevant ADF resources and services have been identified and are presented for consideration.

The protective factor of being involved in sport is also discussed. The ADF's Good Sports program, its activity in NSW and its contribution to the NSW State Plan is presented as an example of a community development program which can positively influence children's involvement in sport. However to have Good Sports rolled out across NSW, government support is required.

The ADF is happy to provide further information as required by the Committee and is available to present in person at public hearings.

1.1 The Australian Drug Foundation

The Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) is a charitable, not-for-profit, independent organisation, founded in 1959 as the Alcoholism Foundation. The mission of the ADF is to prevent alcohol and other drug problems and reduce alcohol and other drug harms. The ADF utilises the strategies of information provision, education, community development, advocacy, and research, and works within a philosophy of harm minimisation. See www.adf.org.au for further details.

The ADF focuses particularly on children and young people under 30 years of age. Young people tend to use alcohol and other drugs in the most dangerous manner and circumstances and so are at greatest risk of injury or loss of life through drug-related behaviour.

The guiding strategic goals of the ADF are to:

- Build the capacity of individuals and their many and varied communities
- Inform these communities about drugs and drug use
- Strengthen and promote the evidence base for responding to drug issues
- Mobilise these communities so that the harmful cultures related to legal or illegal drug use are changed.

Current ADF programs and services include:

- The Good Sports Program works with community sporting clubs to enable them to manage alcohol in a responsible manner.
- The DrugInfo Clearinghouse (incorporating the Resource Centre, the Somazone, Koori and Multicultural websites and the Druginfo Shop), develops and disseminates reliable information on alcohol and drugs to professionals and the wider community.
- The Community Alcohol Action Network (CAAN) raises awareness of alcohol as an issue of public health and safety and encourages community members and policy makers to act to reduce alcohol risks and harms.
- ADIN (Australian Drug Information Network) provides a central point of access to quality Internet-based alcohol and drug information provided by prominent organisations in Australia and overseas.
- The Centre for Youth Drug Studies conducts research into factors that influence young people's drinking and drug use. The findings from these studies feed directly into developing more effective responses.
- Policy development: the ADF contributes to the development and review of drug and alcohol policy, regulation and legislation.

2.0 Key determinants of alcohol and drug use

Understanding the factors which contribute to the risk of developing problematic drug use assists governments to identify how a whole of government approach can be taken to ensure children and their families are provided with the support and services needed to reduce the risk of alcohol and drug use. The ADF refers the Committee to the 2004 monograph published by the MCDS on the 'Prevention of substance use, risk and harm in Australia' for an overview of these factors. The ADF's publication "*Drugs in Focus: a guide to building resilience in 10-14 year olds*" is recommended as a useful overview of the issue. A copy is being enclosed with the mailed version of this submission.

Social disadvantage such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness or insecure housing are strongly linked to health damaging behaviours, including alcohol and drug use.

There is also a whole raft of factors which act as risk or protective factors for harmful alcohol or drug use.

Risk factors include social, environmental and individual factors that can independently predict involvement in early and heavy drug use. Protective factors work to moderate and mediate the impact of risk factors and make the child more resilient. The key risk factors for children (9-14 years) have been identified as: parenting style; relationships with teachers; adjustment to school, and experience with peers. Environmental risk factors include growing up in a community which has high levels of drug use, community disadvantage and disorganisation; ready availability of drugs; and positive media portrayal of drugs.

Protective factors include: attachment to family; parental harmony; parents who supervise and are involved with their children; and good inter-family communication. School retention, success at school, and involvement in sport are all recognized as protective factors.

3.0 Supporting families and parents as partners in drug prevention.

For children of 9-14 years old, their families, especially parents, are the main influencers in their lives. Resourcing and supporting parents and families to be positive role models and to provide supportive environments for their children in relation to drug use is essential.

The ADF believes that the provision of accurate information is a fundamental aspect of all drug prevention strategies. While information may not necessarily result directly in behaviour change, it is a critical element that feeds the process of change. All members of the community seeking information must have access to information that is accurate and relevant.

The ADF's DrugInfo Clearinghouse functions as a drug prevention network, providing easy access to information about alcohol and other drugs, and drug prevention. Professionals and members of the general community can use the service as their first port of call for information from local, national and international sources.

The ADF has developed and disseminates a range of information resources targeted at parents. In particular we draw the Committee's attention to the Drug in Focus series which includes:

- Riding the waves: a guide to building resilience in 10-14 yr olds.
- Parent focus: dealing with drug issues for 9-14 yr old.
- Alcohol and other drugs: a guide for parents.
- Teenage drinking: the facts and issues.
- Hosting teenage parties: managing alcohol and other drugs

Other relevant ADF resources include

- Safety first: helping children to stay safe
- Dealing with Cannabis Use: a guide for parents
- Dealing with Heroin Use: a guide for parents
- Dealing with Party drug use: a guide for parents

Copies of these titles are being sent with the mailed copy of this submission.

The DrugInfo Clearinghouse website (www.druginfo.adf.org.au) also provides a range of drug information including information specifically for parents/families. The website is extremely popular as a source of drug information for the community receiving over 1 million individual visits per year.

4.0 Involvement in sport

Participation in sport is a significant contributor to individual and community health, wellbeing, self-esteem and social cohesion, and more than 30% of the NSW population are members of over 10,000 community sport clubs. However, as well as being a protective factor against drug use, there is concern about the influence of sporting clubs on heavy drinking. Evidence shows that a heavy drinking culture exists in Australian sport and associated behaviour can lead to health, safety and mental health issues. This has reduced the impact of community sport in building strong and healthy communities. Some of the negative behaviours identified in NSW community sport clubs at the 2003 NSW Alcohol Summit are:

- unlicensed alcohol sales
- binge drinking
- drink driving
- underage drinking.

To be a positive contributor to health, wellbeing, self-esteem and social cohesion, sport needs to consistently and effectively provide safe, healthy and family-orientated environments. The ADF's Good Sports program assists community sport clubs to build such environments by managing alcohol responsibly.

4.1 The ADF's Good Sports program (www.goodsports.com.au) is a national prevention program of the ADF that enhances the critical role community sporting clubs play in their communities. The major strategy of Good Sports is a three-level accreditation program, designed to help clubs change their culture so that it is more focused on young people and families and less on the consumption of alcohol at high-risk levels.

Over 30% of the population participates in regular organised sport activities, but evidence shows that community sports clubs contribute to alcohol problems by accepting and promoting excessive drinking and providing inappropriate role models for young people. Research conducted by the Centre for Youth Drug Studies (2000) found one in seven men aged 18 to 20 consumed 13 or more standard drinks each time they visited their community sporting club. A third of the respondents drank at their club three or four times per week, and 83% drove home from their club. Further research concluded:

- Over 30% of 13 to 17 year olds participate in unsupervised drinking at a sports club.
- 51% of drinkers at sports clubs consume alcohol at harmful or hazardous levels.
- 35% of club members acknowledge drink driving takes place from their club.

Good Sports grew from the ADF's conclusion that by promoting and serving alcohol in a responsible manner, clubs could reduce binge drinking and underage drinking, leading to a lower incidence of offences such as drink driving, violence and assault. The Program does not represent a one-off intervention but focuses on the creation of sustainable change by enabling sports clubs to modify and improve their systems and practices around responsible serving of alcohol. Good Sports primary measures of success are to:

- Reduce alcohol-related problems such as underage drinking, drink driving, violence and assault.
- Change the behaviour of players, supporters and members of community

- o sporting clubs.
- o Increase the viability, value and impact of sporting clubs in their communities.

Research and Evaluation

Good Sports is an evidence-based prevention and early intervention community development strategy. Research and evaluation have been critical components of the Program's development and will continue as an imperative operational category.

The ADF's Centre for Youth Drug Studies coordinates the Good Sports national research agenda in partnership with other National and State research and evaluation agencies that specialise in relevant fields.

4.1.1 Good Sports' Rationale – Australia's Drinking Culture

Alcohol is the most widely used drug in Australia. Its misuse is second only to tobacco as a preventable cause of death and hospitalization, and it is the third leading cause of disability – accounting for 5% of the total disease burden in Australia.

The way alcohol is consumed in Australia is one of the leading factors in alcohol's impact on crime, anti-social behaviour, road safety and the poor health of Indigenous and other Australians, including linked co-morbidity with serious health issues such as obesity, smoking and mental illness.

While alcohol has some health and social benefits, a major societal issue is Australia's drinking culture. Over 43% of the population feel that getting drunk is an acceptable part of the Australian way of life, and two-thirds of the alcohol consumed by people under 25 years of age posed a risk of short-term or acute health consequences, i.e. 'binge drinking'.

In NSW, alcohol abuse costs \$7 million each day through lost labour and productivity, and the costs arising from crime, road accidents and to the health system . Nationally, the financial burden of alcohol misuse to the community has been estimated to be \$4.5

billion per year. It is estimated that 84% of these costs (\$3.8 billion) are potentially preventable and amenable to public policy initiatives

4.2 Good Sports in NSW

In 2003 the NSW Alcohol Summit identified that NSW community sports clubs were responsible for some of the highest incident factors for unlicensed alcohol sales, binge and underage drinking, and drink driving. As a result, Good Sports' state-wide delivery was a top ten recommendation of the 2003 NSW Alcohol Summit. The Good Sports NSW Reference Group – consisting of 13 State Government Departments and Agencies and selected industry representation– was subsequently established to assist the Program's roll-out in NSW.

The Good Sports NSW Pilot, conducted in the south coast region between 2002 and 2005, was co-funded by the RTA and the then Southern Area Health. Good Sports has operated on a restricted basis to test the Pilot's recommendations, build a partnership base, and develop the most efficient and sustainable delivery strategy for NSW.

As at April 1 2008, Good Sports is operational in 35 NSW local government areas and there are over 430 community sports clubs progressing through Good Sports' 3-Level Accreditation Program.

4.2.1 Good Sports and the NSW State Plan

The *Good Sports NSW State Plan Alignment Strategy 2008 – 2011* was presented to the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, in 2007. The submission was prepared in consultation with members of Good Sports NSW Reference Group, including NSW Health.

Achieving NSW State Plan Targets

Good Sports will assist the NSW Government to achieve its State Plan targets in the following areas of activity:

Rights, Respect and Responsibility

- R1 – Reduction in crime
- R3 – Reduction in anti-social behaviour
- R4 – Increased participation and integration in community activities

Delivering Better Services

- S3 – Improved health through decreased obesity, smoking, drug use and risky drinking
- S7 – Safe roads

Fairness and Opportunity

- F1 – Improved health and education for Aboriginal people
- F3 – Improved outcomes in mental health

Environment for Living

- E8 – More people using parks, sport and recreation facilities and participating in the arts and cultural activity

Good Sports will do this through achieving the following outcomes:

- Reduce the 'boozy' culture of NSW sport clubs.
- Reduce high-risk drinking in NSW sport clubs.
- Change the drink drive culture in NSW sport clubs.
- Reduce underage drinking at NSW sport clubs.
- Create inclusive and welcoming cultures in NSW sports clubs.
- Increase the viability of NSW sports clubs.
- Increase the social capacity of NSW sport club members.
- Improve NSW sport club impact in, and connection with, local communities.
- Increase participation in NSW sports clubs.
- Increase non-playing (i.e. volunteering) sport club membership in NSW sports clubs.
- Assist NSW sport clubs to provide a safer and healthier setting for Aboriginal people.

The ADF has received in-principle support from 14 NSW Government Departments / Agencies for the state wide roll out of Good Sports which is costed at \$1.3M per annum.

This roll out is dependent on financial support being provided by the NSW government. The potential major NSW Government funding bodies have been identified as NSW Sport & Recreation, RTA and NSW Health.

4.3 Sport and illicit drugs

The ADF has been experiencing an increasing demand to assist sporting clubs at all levels to also address issues surrounding illegal drugs. Issues relating to illegal drug use are complex, often confused with performance enhancing drugs and closely linked to alcohol use, so the ADF is currently reviewing how to address both alcohol and illegal drug issues within the sporting environment.

Three potential strategies to address illegal drugs are being investigated:

1. Intensive consultancy to address the whole of organisation culture including change management and organisational development
2. Provision of practical guidelines and sample policy (in conjunction with education session)
3. Incorporation of illegal drugs in the existing Good Sports program

The ADF are currently working with several elite level sports (some based in NSW) to develop a whole of organization approach to alcohol and illegal drugs management. The projects involve an initial consultation and scoping phase to ascertain systems currently in place followed by the development of an implementation plan to introduce various alcohol and drug management polices and procedures that ultimately aims for whole of organisation cultural change.

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