

**Submission  
No 21**

## **INQUIRY INTO DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT**

**Organisation:** UnitingCare NSW.ACT

**Date received:** 1/03/2013

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UnitingCare NSW.ACT is the Board of the NSW and ACT Synod of the Uniting Church responsible for the work of community services, chaplaincy and social justice advocacy. All our work is inspired and guided by the principles of justice and compassion.

Services include aged care and disability programs, services for vulnerable families, children and young people and quality early childhood education and care. UnitingCare NSW.ACT also manages the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross, the only supervised injecting facility in Australia.

As well as the provision of these services, we demonstrate a strong commitment to social justice advocacy by publicly speaking out on issues that affect the people we serve. Our vision is 'a just, fair and compassionate society in which all members are treated with dignity and respect, enabled to live fulfilling lives and contribute to the prosperity of the nation'. UnitingCare services operate in accordance with the principles of access, equity, participation and human rights.

In striving for social justice, UnitingCare NSW.ACT takes the Gospel of Jesus Christ and puts it up against the complex issues of the world. At times this has been and will be controversial, especially when it challenges people within the Church and the broader community to rethink some of their ideas. But we believe that to be a Church with integrity it is essential to take up issues on behalf of the marginalized and give a voice to the disadvantaged. All our work is biblically based and is built on the strong foundations and the traditional faith of the Church.

UnitingCare NSW.ACT was approached by the NSW Government in 2000 to oversee the trial of the country's first supervised injecting centre. The hope was this service could make contact with particularly disadvantaged members of the community who were struggling with drug addiction. The primary aim of the service was to save lives and prevent injury related to drug overdose.

There was support from the Board of Social Responsibility as it was then known, and from across the breadth of UnitingCare. We hold the license to operate this facility, and now own the building where it operates, which was bought to provide long term stability and certainty to the service. Despite the political controversy, and the sometime negative portrayals in the media, the MSIC has received repeated positive endorsements from multiple independent evaluations over nearly a decade. This service has been clearly documented to save lives, to keep people as healthy as possible, to refer them into appropriate treatment and care services, and to take public drug injecting off the streets. We are very pleased to see the extensive support for the service not only among the local residents and businesses of Kings Cross, but also from across the medical and scientific communities in Australia. We note extensive correspondence to the NSW Government in 2010 in support of this service, from organisations such as the Australian Medical Association and Royal Australasian College of Physicians, and Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, all requesting the overturning of the centre's trial status. We were very pleased when this trial status was finally lifted in late 2010.

We are very proud of our involvement in this compassionate harm reduction service. The work being done at the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross is a clear example of the values and vision of UnitingCare NSW.ACT being put into practice. Clinical staff at the centre bear witness to the lives and histories of people who attend and they treat all people with dignity and respect.

The Reverend Harry Herbert was recently appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in the 2013 Australia Day honours. Reverend Herbert was awarded the AM for his significant services to the community through leadership and advocacy roles and his role in the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre was specifically noted.

It is the view of UnitingCare NSW.ACT that any drug & alcohol treatment must be provided with regard to ethical principles and the best available evidence, and with due regard to the person's own best interests and wishes. In relation to D&A treatment services particularly, we believe that services need to be flexible, patient focussed, and respectful of human rights.

We look forward to seeing an ongoing commitment to harm reduction principles from this NSW Government, acknowledging that while becoming drug free may be the long term goal of many, short term goals such as keeping people alive and healthy and reducing the spread of blood borne viruses are all essential.

We would be happy to discuss any aspect of this submission were it requested by the Committee.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Mr Howard Packer  
Deputy Chairman  
UnitingCare NSW.ACT

1/3/13