

Jim Sheedy

28 October 2003

Jan Burnswoods MLC
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Inquiry into the Inebriates Act 1912
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your inquiry into this important social issue. To be brief my input can be best communicated by example thus:

Only on one occasion have I supported a recommendation to use the Inebriates Act, which was on a mental health patient in a rural setting. I will never do so again under the current conditions.

The person in question suffers from a severe mental illness and multiple addictions. The addictions are more life threatening and cause greater social harm than the mental illness. Community Treatment Orders proved ineffectual.

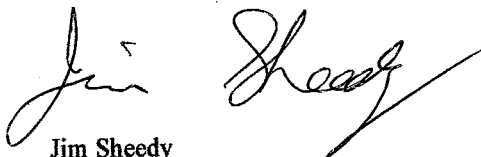
While under 6 months containment under the Inebriates Act there were systems failures. For example, it was made overtly clear that this type of patient was not wanted at the designated hospital and according to urine screens there was no difficulty in obtaining drugs while supposedly in care.

We deprived a citizen of his liberty for 6 months, taking him against his will to an institution he finds extremely stressful to cope in, only to provide poor clinical and social outcomes. Even though we had good intentions we failed this individual.

Therefore even though changes in the Inebriates Act may be useful it is only a small part of the needed solutions. The appropriate centres of care need to be established that actually want to and are equipped to cater for patient's needs. Moreover, the majority of our resources need to go into primary prevention strategies in attempts to significantly reduce the problems long term.

In conclusion, I wish the Committee well in its quest to find viable enduring solutions to these devastating social problems. Problems that are often preventable yet cause enormous social costs.

Yours truly,



Jim Sheedy
MAPS, RN.