

**Submission
No 43**

INQUIRY INTO DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT

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Legislative Council
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW 2000

NHMRC Submission to the NSW Inquiry into Drug and Alcohol Treatment

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the NSW Inquiry into Drug and Alcohol Treatment (the Inquiry).

NHMRC is Australia's leading expert body for supporting health and medical research; for developing health advice for the Australian community, health professionals and governments; and for providing advice on ethical behaviour in health care and in the conduct of health and medical research. NHMRC believes that policy should be firmly based on the best available, quality evidence, and we work with researchers and institutions to ensure that research is conducted at the highest standards and at the highest standards of integrity.

I note the terms of reference refer to "The current body of evidence and recommendations of the National Health and Medical Research Council". I provide details below of relevant NHMRC publications setting out a body of evidence, two of which make recommendations.

Additionally, the terms of reference to the Inquiry cover a number of priorities for NHMRC, as outlined in *NHMRC Strategic Plan 2013-15*¹. These priorities include creating new knowledge through support of discovery research, accelerating research translation and setting high standards in ethics in health care and research.

As the Australian Government's key agency investing in health and medical research, NHMRC is focused on encouraging excellence in health and medical research to improve the health of all Australians. In the past decade NHMRC has almost quadrupled our funding for research into addiction and substance misuse and has published several guidance documents relating to drug and alcohol abuse management, including a national statement on ethical conduct in clinical trials, and an issues paper focussing on drugs and alcohol.

NHMRC guidance documents

NHMRC has developed a number of guidance documents which relate to drug and alcohol abuse management, and research that will contribute to improving these systems. These documents are available on our website and summarised below:

¹ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/node/31313>

- *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks From Drinking Alcohol (2009)*² which aim to establish the evidence base for future policies and community materials on reducing the health risks that arise from drinking alcohol. The guidelines communicate evidence concerning these risks to the Australian community to allow individuals to make informed decisions regarding the amount of alcohol that they choose to drink.
- *Consensus-Based Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Volatile Substance Use in Australia (2011)*³. These guidelines provide practical, evidence-based recommendations, consensus-based recommendations and practice points to assist healthcare workers to identify, assess and treat people who use volatile substances.
- *Naltrexone Implant Treatment for Opioid Dependence - Literature Review (2010)*⁴. This review into the use of naltrexone implants for the treatment of opioid dependence in Australia found that although naltrexone implant treatment may show some efficacy as part of an integrated program, more research is needed. Based on the information then available, it concluded that naltrexone implants are an experimental product and as such should only be used in the context of a well conducted randomised controlled trial with the following characteristics:
 - sufficient sample size;
 - appropriate duration of treatment and follow up;
 - regular robust monitoring;
 - provision of a comprehensive psychosocial treatment program; and
 - comparison to current best practice.

The literature review concluded that until these trials have occurred and the relevant data are available and validated, the efficacy of the treatment, alone or in comparison to conventional first line treatments, cannot be determined.

Ethics in health care and research

In addition to our guidance documents, NHMRC has produced the following two publications relating to ethical conduct in human research:

- *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Statement)⁵. This publication, which was last updated in 2009, outlines the:
 - values and principles of ethical conduct in human research;
 - concept of risk in research; and
 - ethical considerations specific to researchers, participants and those involved in research governance.

² <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/your-health/alcohol-guidelines>

³ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/cp136-and-cp136a>

⁴ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/media/notices/2011/naltrexone-implant-treatment-opioid-dependence-literature-review>

⁵ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e72>

- *Ethical Issues in Research into Alcohol and Other Drugs: An Issues Paper Exploring the Need for a Guidance Framework (2012)*⁶. This paper expands on the guidance provided in the National Statement, with a specific focus on research into alcohol and drugs.

NHMRC investment in research

NHMRC has increased its funding for research into addiction and substance misuse issues over the last 12 years, with funding rising from \$3.8m in 2000 to \$19.9m in 2012⁷. However, applications in these research fields represent just a small proportion of all applications for funding to NHMRC and therefore there may be a need to build the capacity of the research workforce in this area.

NHMRC welcomes the NSW Legislative Council's Inquiry and trusts that this submission will assist the Commission in its work. For more information contact Professor John McCallum on (02) 6217 9033.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive Officer

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⁶ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/ds12>

⁷ <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/research-funding-statistics-and-data/funding-datasets/addiction-and-substance-abuse>