

Chapter Six – Health, Drug and Alcohol Issues

“Community Safety is about working together to combat crime and fear of crime”.

- 37 Year old Waterloo Resident

6.1 Introduction

It is widely accepted that one of the most complex social issues affecting communities all over the world is the use and misuse of illicit drugs and alcohol. The Redfern-Waterloo area is no different to most other areas in this regard in terms of being faced with the challenges brought on by the impact of drug and alcohol use in the community. The problems caused by alcohol and drug use and misuse include unsafely discarded needles and syringes, intoxication, dealing and using in public places and violence all of which can contribute to negative perceptions of community image. The key is to develop practical solutions to tackle the drug problem and to ease the suffering of individuals and families caught in the cycle of drug use.

6.2 Harm Minimisation

Harm minimisation aims to improve health, social and economic outcomes for both the community and the individual and accepts that a level of drug use in society is inevitable. A harm minimisation approach is responding to the potential risk to drug users themselves and to the broader community of the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV / AIDS and Hepatitis C from the sharing of injecting equipment, and therefore a key component of harm minimisation strategies is the provision of needle and syringe programs to ensure the use of clean injecting equipment.

Harm minimisation regards drug users as members of society with optimal outcomes ultimately received through reintegration. Harm minimisation is a philosophy that acknowledges that a range of strategies such as abstinence-based approaches, primary prevention, early intervention, treatment and rehabilitation are required to achieve the desired outcomes. For illicit drugs it proposes strategies to reduce supply use and harm.

6.3 National Illicit Drug Strategy

The National Illicit Drugs strategy is a partnership between the Health and Ageing Portfolio, Justice and Customs, Education, Science and Training and Family and Community Services. The strategy provides funding toward the National Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative which aims to provide minor drug offenders with alternatives to the criminal justice system by providing greater access to appropriate education, assessment and treatment services. Other priorities of the strategy include:

- addressing the new public health challenges faced by the increased availability and use of psychostimulants, such as amphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine;
- improving treatment for drug users with co-existing mental health problems;
- establishing a National Illicit Drug Strategy Research Fund with an emphasis on developing strategies to address challenges faced by the alcohol and drug workforce and
- providing the public with access to quality assured drug related information and referral.⁵¹

6.4 New South Wales Government and Illicit Drug and Alcohol Initiatives

The New South Wales Government has undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at addressing issues in relation to drug and alcohol use throughout the state. One innovative program announced in 2000 was the illicit drug diversion initiative. The major components of the initiative are:

- The Cannabis Cautioning Scheme – a pre-court diversionary scheme where adults may be given cautioning notices and information on the health and legal consequences of cannabis use;
- Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) Program – an early court intervention pilot for offenders with established significant illicit drug use problems;
- Young Offenders Scheme – which involves the inclusion of some drug offences into the Young Offenders Act and allows police, in appropriate circumstances to issue a warning or formal caution, or organise a youth justice conference instead of commencing court proceedings;
- Youth Drug Court Pilot – an initiative linked to the Young Offenders Act for offenders with problematic drug and alcohol related behaviour
- Community Drug Action Teams (CDATS) – in response to the 1999 Drug Summit Community Drug Action Teams have been formed across the state where groups of people work together to take action on drug-related concerns at the local level.

The N.S.W. Government will also be conducting an Alcohol Summit in August 2003 to explore ways of reducing any negative effects of alcohol use and abuse in local communities.

6.5 Redfern-Waterloo Initiatives

Community Consultation

The issue of illicit drug use in the Redfern-Waterloo area was frequently mentioned by the range of people consulted in the planning process. People were concerned about issues relating to dealing in public places and from private homes as well as unsafely discarded needles and syringes. Many people mentioned the number of dysfunctional families in the area where drug and alcohol issues were perceived to be a problem and which was mentioned as an issue contributing to the numbers of unsupervised children and young people in the two suburbs.

When people were asked what could be done to address the issue many respondents commented on the complexity of the issue and there was an acknowledgement that there were

⁵¹ Australian Department of Ageing (2003), National Illicit Drug Strategy, Fact sheet, No 5

no easy answers. Suggestions included increased education programs for young people and pursuing new ideas which had previously not been attempted.

The Redfern-Waterloo Anti-Drug Strategy

The Redfern-Waterloo Anti-Drug Strategy was announced by the Premier in November 2002. The strategy is an integrated planning approach for responding to the use of illegal drug use in Redfern and Waterloo as well as Darlington. The strategy incorporates a number of practical responses to specific crime and safety issues in Redfern and Waterloo which are covered in chapter two of this plan, the Crime Profile.

The Anti-Drug Strategy also contains initiatives in relation to treatment and rehabilitation, prevention, education, family and social support. Some of the achievements of the strategy to date include:

- Increased opportunities for magistrates to adopt a more flexible approach to bail conditions and sentencing including establishing a Redfern M.E.R.I.T. Program. Police Operation Command have been involved in training police in the M.E.R.I.T. Program. The program involves the Central Sydney Area Health Service (C.S.A.H.S.), Police and the Attorney General's Department and commenced in Redfern Court in March 2003. Police and lawyers make people aware of the M.E.R.I.T. Program following arrest and refer them to the program. Participation is voluntary and their participation and treatment is taken into account by the Court in sentencing. To date 71 men and women who are over eighteen years of age have entered the program from Redfern and Burwood and the results have shown that the likelihood of reoffending is reduced. Almost half of the participants have never been assessed or been in a treatment program and more than half have a family member with drug and alcohol problems.
- C.S.A.H.S. have negotiated with a contractor to undertake an assertive clean-up of used needles seven days a week in The Block area since December 2002
- An education program has been put in place to refer requests for large numbers of needles to the Resource and Education Program for Injecting Drug Users (R.E.P.I.D.U.) in Pitt Street Redfern and other fixed outlets where appropriate. Numbers of needles distributed per presentation on The Block have decreased from 30.9 in August 2002 to 18.6 in March 2003
- C.S.A.H.S. have agreed to improve health outcomes for residents of Redfern including better management of drug overdose.

Redfern-Waterloo Community Drug Action Team (CDAT)

Local Community Drug Action planning is a strategy introduced by the N.S.W. Government in response to the Drug Summit held in May 1999. The Redfern-Waterloo Community Drug Action Team was then established and is made up of a number of government departments, Council, community organisations and residents. The Redfern CDAT has put together an Action Plan titled “Lifting the Shutters” which has developed a number of strategies around:

- Reducing the impact of drug taking behaviour on the community
- Reducing the incidence of violent crime
- Developing resources for community education around illicit drug use and
- Addressing issues associated with young people and drug and alcohol use.

6.6 Council Services and the Draft Social Plan – Drugs and Alcohol

The South Sydney Council Draft Social Plan has identified drug and alcohol and associated problems across many sections of the community including children and families, Aboriginal people, the gay, lesbian and transgender communities and young people.

Issues identified include:

- Alcoholism and injecting drug use
- Associated drug and alcohol problems such as sexually transmitted diseases, abuse, domestic violence, child neglect and housing and homelessness, unemployment, and mental health and
- Lack of drug and alcohol services for young people.⁵²



A fixed syringe bin in a public toilet part of Council's commitment to the safe disposal of needles and syringes.

⁵² South Sydney City Council (2003) Draft Social Plan Op. Cit.

Alcohol Forum

South Sydney Council hosted an Alcohol Forum in July 2003 with the aim of exploring harm reduction strategies designed to reduce the impact of alcohol-related harm on individuals and the community. The forum was well attended by a range of groups and individuals including Redfern Police, the Department of Gaming and Racing and the Australian Hotels Association. The Forum discussed issues such as wet centres or tolerance zones where people could drink legally in public places, alcohol free zones, treatment and rehabilitation and other service provision issues as well as many of the social problems that may result from alcohol use and abuse such as domestic violence and mental health. Council has since forwarded a submission to the N.S.W. Government in August 2003.

6.7 Drug and Alcohol Services in Redfern and Waterloo

There are a number of drug and alcohol service providers operating in the Redfern-Waterloo area. In Redfern the Central Sydney Area Health Service supports (R.E.P.I.D.U.) which works to prevent transmission of HIV, hepatitis and other communicable diseases among people who inject drugs. The Redfern Community Health Centre also provides community HIV programs as well as mental health and community nursing.

The Aboriginal Medical Service (A.M.S.) in Redfern is a facility where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access a number of culturally aware medical professionals. The service offers a drug and alcohol unit and a number of other services including quit smoking and sexual assault counselling and mental health services.

The South East Sydney Area Health Service (S.E.S.A.H.S.) supports a drug and alcohol counsellor and education programs run by the Fact Tree Youth Service. S.E.S.A.H.S. also funds Aboriginal drug and alcohol counselling, mental health services, group facilitation and dual diagnosis programs through South Sydney Youth Services.

A privately run methadone clinic, Regent House operates on Botany Road in Waterloo.

With the exception of Regent House these organisations have all been consulted in relation to this plan.

The following strategies have been developed with regard to viewing illicit drug use and abuse as primarily a public health and social issue. The strategies aim to reduce the impact on the community of illicit drug and alcohol use and prevent any harm to the community. The strategies are designed to complement the existing work of the area health services, the Redfern-Waterloo Anti-drug strategy, Redfern CDAT and local community services.

Strategy	Who
<p>6.0 Establish a Drug and Alcohol Taskforce made up community representatives, non-government and government agencies with a view to responding to substance abuse in Redfern and Waterloo including developing responses to the recommendations made by the NSW Alcohol Summit.</p>	<p>Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project (RWPP), relevant Government and Government agencies, local residents.</p>
<p>6.1 Develop a strategy in relation to how overdose is managed, including the effect on residents and families.</p>	<p>Redfern Police, C.S.A.H.S.</p>
<p>6.2 Develop an educational package and video around drugs and alcohol for people in custody.</p>	<p>Redfern Police, C.S.A.H.S.</p>
<p>6.3 Develop and support family drug support programs with DOCs, Health, local community groups and services.</p>	<p>RWPP, C.S.A.H.S., DOCs, and relevant community organisations</p>
<p>6.4 Build information on minimising the harm caused by illicit drug use into community events and festivals.</p>	<p>C.S.A.H.S., S.E.S.A.H.S. and relevant community organisations</p>
<p>6.5 Continue to provide the Magistrate's Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) program in Redfern.</p>	<p>MERIT funding from Attorney General's Department, C.S.A.H.S. and treatment agencies including Redfern AMS staff.</p>
<p>6.6 Promote information about harm minimisation and drug and alcohol issues in the Inner City News.</p>	<p>Council</p>
<p>6.7 Under the Human Services Review Seek investigate funding opportunities which aim to improve education on drug issues to the wider community.</p>	<p>C.S.A.H.S., S.E.S.A.H.S., Council in partnership with the community sector.</p>

Strategy	Who
<p>6.8 Implement the Premiers Department Community Drug Information and Public Libraries Project at Waterloo Library to educate and promote access to information on illicit drugs for the general public.</p>	<p>Council</p>
<p>6.9 Establish a Liquor Accord with local Clubs and Pubs in the development of responsible alcohol provision policies and procedures and to provide a forum for licensees to address community issues in relation to alcohol use and abuse.</p>	<p>Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project</p>
<p>6.10 Develop campaigns for young drivers aimed at educating young people about the dangers of drinking and driving through the Drivin' for Employment Project.</p>	<p>Council</p>
<p>6.11 Under the Human Services Review investigate opportunities for initiatives and funding to address issues related to mental health.</p>	<p>Human Services Review staff.</p>
<p>6.12 Under the Human Services Review investigate opportunities for initiatives and funding to address issues related to Aboriginal health.</p>	<p>Human Services Review staff.</p>