

PENINGTON INSTITUTE STRATEGIC PLAN 2015–2020

Introduction

Substance use issues are complex and controversial. Since the beginning of the ‘war on drugs’, which attempted to eradicate drug production and trafficking while criminalising consumption, drug use and its associated harms have increased. The war on drugs is often linked with inadequate government investment in health and safety approaches.

No country has come up with a perfect combination of policies; however it is clear that, in many countries, repressive and ineffective approaches still prevail. Drug prohibition policies often fuel corruption, addiction, violence, death and violation of human rights.¹ Meanwhile, the extremist arguments for unfettered legalization or total prohibition extinguish community hope, stifle innovation and reduce the prospect of sensible reform.

A constructive debate about viable alternatives, at the local, national and international levels, that puts public health and safety first, is long overdue. Penington Institute commits itself to lead and influence that debate: to inform the public, to expertly advise policy makers and to serve our stakeholders.

Underpinning this Strategic Plan is a renewed commitment to building effective partnerships with a broad range of people. By building strong and diverse relationships in all aspects of our work, we can deliver and support effective policy and service responses – especially among communities most affected by drug harm. There are many potential contributors to better managing drug use – people who use drugs, family members, affected communities, law and policymakers, scientists and health professionals, educators, law enforcement officers and the judiciary. We must engage respectfully with all of them.

Penington Institute has a proud history of effective advocacy. Over recent years, we have helped to increase funding for, and access to, services that reduce drug harm such as the needle and syringe program, opioid substitution treatment, overdose prevention initiatives and the community response to ice use.

We are now in a position to lead and influence greater change. If our strategy is ambitious, it is because drug problems are immense and urgent. This Strategic Plan 2015-2020 sets out how we intend to make a powerful impact and save lives.

¹ Global Commission on Drug Policy (2014). *Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work*. www.globalcommissiondrugs.org.

Drug Policy in Context

In 1971, US President, Richard Nixon, embarked on a war on drugs. This policy had strong support from the International Narcotics Control Board based in Vienna, but was largely controlled by the US State Department. Since then, the scale of the international illicit drug trade has steadily increased to a level greater than almost all categories of international trade, with the exception of armaments]. President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of State, George Shultz, wrote in 1990 "that the war on drugs is doomed to fail... that the conceptual base of the current program is flawed ... that we need at least to consider and examine forms of controlled legalisation of drugs". The death knell for the war on drugs was sounded over a quarter of a century ago and yet we are still struggling to adopt rational and evidence-based drug policy.

In Australia in 1985, national agreement was reached on a new National Strategy on Drugs.

It declared that "The objective of a national policy on drug use should be to minimise the harmful consequences of drug use to individuals, their families and the community as a whole, including special groups." The concept of "harm minimisation", including education to dissuade drug use, improved access to treatment, together with continued attempts to prevent importation and production of drugs, became embedded in policy. The National Strategy on Drugs has been repeatedly modified in detail over the years but harm reduction, which focuses on reducing the adverse health, social and economic impact of drug use, remains a key component. Although Australia adopted a "harm minimisation" policy in regard to drug use, the war on drugs sentiment remained. Public spending on supply reduction including law enforcement and incarceration of people for drug related offenses overwhelmingly outweighs expenditure on prevention, treatment and harm reduction.²

² Ritter, A., McLeod, R., & Shanahan, M. (2013). Monograph No. 24: Government drug policy expenditure in Australia – 2009/10. *DPMP Monograph Series*. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.



VISION

Communities are safe, healthy and empowered to manage drug use.

MISSION

Penington Institute actively supports the adoption of approaches to drug use which promote safety and human dignity.

OUR UNDERSTANDING

- » The 'war on drugs' approach has failed. Innovative approaches connecting substance use research to practical action are required.
- » The drug control system should emphasise public safety and public health.
- » Substantive change is required. Change should be driven by evidence, transparency and cost-effectiveness – not fear and prejudice.
- » Prioritising personal responsibility, family and community will empower people and yield better results than centralised government drug control.

PRINCIPLES

In pursuing our mission we are committed to the following principles:

- » **Integrity:** We support fair, transparent, evidence-based systems that improve the safety and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
- » **Respect for Human Dignity:** We focus on the health, safety, and welfare of individuals, families and communities in a way that is consistent with human rights principles. All people, regardless of background, are entitled to feasible and accessible options that nurture their capacity for positive change.
- » **Persistence:** We believe that responding to drug use requires innovation and evaluation of a combination of approaches. There is no simple solution but by persisting, we will make a positive difference.
- » **Empowerment:** Tackling drug problems is a shared responsibility. Governments must empower communities to manage drug use. Positive change requires individual responsibility tempered with government and community support.

Key outcome areas

We will strive to:

1. Encourage and empower people affected by drug use to make safer and healthier choices.
2. Support professionals' capacity to deliver high quality interventions to address the harms associated with drug use.

3. Achieve the right policy and legal framework.

This will be delivered by:

4. A dynamic, engaged and sustainable organisation.

1. Encourage and empower people affected by drug use to make safer and healthier choices.

Penington Institute will:

- » Increase individuals' health literacy and capacity.
- » Promote public discussion and understanding – contributing to a community rethink on how to tackle drug use, promoting hope and eliminating stigma.
- » Raise awareness and educate people from diverse communities about the harms associated with drug use and ways to reduce them.

2. Support professionals' capacity to deliver high quality interventions to address the harms associated with drug use.

Penington Institute will:

- » Deliver professional development and support to various groups and workforces.
- » Develop resources using all available media to support the delivery of interventions.
- » Facilitate the sharing of ideas and connections between services, professional groups and workforces impacting local communities.
- » Help individuals and organisations to overcome their resistance to working with people affected by drug use, promoting a civilised approach to improve health and wellbeing.

3. Achieve the right policy and legal framework

Penington Institute will:

- » Review evidence of and support for effective policy and interventions.
- » Recommend further research to address gaps in the evidence base.
- » Engage with policy makers in government and with communities to address the challenge of drug use in an integrated and comprehensive way and with a focus on public safety and public health.
- » Partner and engage with communities, and the public and private sectors to effect change.

4. Build a dynamic, engaged and sustainable organisation

Penington Institute will:

- » Ensure a high standard of corporate governance.
- » Improve systems and processes to ensure a well-managed, efficient and effective workplace.
- » Develop and support staff and volunteer engagement and capability.
- » Generate financial resources to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.