

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.30PM FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2018

PENINGTON INSTITUTE BACKS A NEW APPROACH TO AUSTRALIA'S FAILING DRUG POLICIES

Australia's leading independent drug research, policy and education organisation, Penington Institute, has today (2 November) welcomed the launch of *'We all pay the price'* - a ground-breaking report on the health and social harms caused by current drug policies.

The national report by Australia21 reflects the views of a cross-sector roundtable, including leading experts and specialists in substance dependence, crime, poverty and law reform.

Penington Institute, which participated in the roundtable, has added its voice to calls for evidence-based action to reduce the number of lives being needlessly lost, particularly through accidental drug overdose, and to reduce the growing burden of grief and despair experienced by families and communities.

Deputy CEO Dr Stephen McNally said that in the past, efforts to reduce the death toll due to overdose have predominantly focused on law enforcement and supply reduction. But the death toll continues to climb.

"The number of accidental deaths due to drug use has risen consistently over the past 15 years from just over 900 in 2002 to more than 1700 in 2016," Dr McNally said.

"Some 15 years ago the number of accidental drug-related deaths and car deaths were roughly the same. By 2016, the number of accidental drug-related deaths were more than double the number killed in car accidents – 1,704 compared to 751.

"Most of the increase has been due to the number of deaths involving prescription opioids such as oxycodone, morphine and codeine.

"The increasing rate of deaths through drug overdose in Australia is unprecedented, as is the consequent burden of human pain and grief. The cost to society, let alone to our health system and economy, is incalculable." Dr McNally said.

"We now face a defining choice - whether to stick with the failed solutions of the past or embrace new approaches.

"It's not easy to cast aside long-held beliefs and prejudices to consider a dramatically different approach, but if it were possible to save even a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of lives being lost globally each year, wouldn't it be worthwhile?"

Dr McNally welcomed the recommendations made in *'We all pay the price'* adding that innovative approaches connecting substance use research to practical action are needed and that the drug control system should emphasise public safety and public health.

“Substantive change, driven by evidence, transparency and cost-effectiveness – not fear and prejudice – is required urgently.” Dr McNally added.

“Empowering people by prioritising personal responsibility, family and community will yield better results than centralised government drug control.”

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We all pay the price available at <http://australia21.org.au/product/we-all-pay-the-price/>.

About Penington Institute

Officially launched in 2014, Penington Institute grew out of the work of Anex and its 20 years’ experience working with people directly affected by problematic drug use. Penington Institute’s mission is to actively support the adoption of approaches to drug use that promote safety and human dignity. It does so through: independent, non-partisan thought leadership, community education, training, research and policy formation.