



David Penington  
1930–2023

# Annual Review 2022

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PENINGTON  
INSTITUTE

# Manifesto

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*Like it or not, drugs are a part of every society.*

*It would be naive to think otherwise. And cruel to ignore it.*

*And, while we don't encourage drug use, there are other things that we will always encourage.*

*Understanding. Openness.*

*Empathy. Communication.*

*Our default as a society has been to pour scorn on those who use drugs and judge them harshly by seeing their problems as self-inflicted.*

***But human beings are complex, and so is this issue.***

*The reasons people use drugs, including alcohol and pharmaceuticals, are countless.*

*Risky behaviours are part of being human. We need to understand that, not condemn it.*

*Judging is easy. Helping is more of a challenge.*

*How do we rise to that challenge?*

***At Penington Institute, we believe in approaching drug use in a safe, considerate and practical way.***

*We seek solutions, not scapegoats.*

*We strive for positive outcomes, not negative stereotypes.*

*We follow evidence and data, but we temper it with compassion and empathy to create change for the better.*

*Our focus is on making individuals and families safer and healthier.*

*Our goal is simple: to help communities and frontline services reduce harm and to make public policy work for the people, not against them.*

*We won't ever give up on that goal, or the people it exists to serve.*

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# Our Strategic Direction

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## Vision

Communities are safe, healthy and empowered to manage substance use, including pharmaceuticals and alcohol.

## Mission

To support cost-effective approaches that maximise community health and safety in relation to drugs.

## How We Do It

Frank and fiercely independent, we connect lived experience with research to improve the management of drugs through community engagement and knowledge sharing.

## Strategic Priorities

Our Strategic Plan 2021-2025 outlines the following strategic priorities that guide our work at Penington Institute:

- I. Improve community understanding about drugs
- II. Promote sensible community approaches to drug use issues
- III. Improve legal and policy frameworks to prioritise public safety and health
- IV. Develop a sustainable, impactful and nimble organisation

Under these strategic priorities, the team at Penington Institute focused our work within the following three areas in 2022:

- Reducing overdose,
- Improving the management of cannabis in the community, and
- Improving knowledge about better approaches to drug use issues.

# Our Organisation

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## Board of Directors

Ms Kathryn Greiner AO (Chair)

Ms Carmel Arthur AOM

Professor Nicholas Lintzeris

The Honourable Vernon White

Dr Hass Dellal AO

Adjunct Associate Professor  
Scott Wilson

Mr David Stewart

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Mr Bruce Lanyon BBus, MBA, FCA, SF Fin

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Ms Georgie Herbert

Mr Andrew North

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Ms Meegan Sullivan

## Our Patrons

Emeritus Professor Sir Gustav Nossal  
AC CBE (Chief Patron)

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Bashir AD CVO

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Professor Peter Doherty AC

Professor Margaret Hamilton AO

Professor The Honourable Barry Jones AC

The Honourable Michael Kirby AC CMG

Emeritus Professor David de Kretser AC

Professor Fiona Stanley AC

Emeritus Professor David Penington AO  
(1930–2023)

*This Annual Review is dedicated to the  
memory of David Penington.*



In Memoriam

# David Penington

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**Penington Institute's namesake and patron, Emeritus Professor David Geoffrey Penington AC, passed away on 6 January 2023. He was 92 years old. He was a champion of rational debate on drug-related issues and was fearless in challenging community attitudes to alcohol and illicit drugs.**

During his lifetime, Professor Penington was one of Australia's leading public intellectuals and health experts. He advocated for sensible policy in his roles as former chair of the National AIDS Task Force, the Victorian Premier's Drug Advisory Council, and the Victorian Government's Drug Policy Expert Committee. In 2014, he was honoured as Victorian of the Year.

Professor Penington exerted an immense influence on the shape of Australian public health policy. He will be best remembered for making Australia a world leader in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but his contribution to drug policy was no less remarkable. He was the driving force behind many ground-breaking and often-controversial initiatives, including Australia's first needle and syringe program and safe injecting site.

Chosen in 1995 by then-Premier Jeff Kennett to chair the Victorian Premier's Drug Advisory Council, Professor Penington was instrumental in

the widescale implementation of drug diversion programs, which brought about a significant reduction in drug-related incarcerations.

An unwavering commitment to rational, evidence-based policy and a belief that scientific innovation should improve the lives of all people guided Professor Penington's endeavours. From 1983-1987 he was Chairman of the Board at Cochlear Ltd., an Australian company whose revolutionary implants have restored the hearing of hundreds of thousands.

Throughout his career, Professor Penington's uncompromising vision encountered resistance both within and outside of the establishment. The pursuit of his goals sometimes came at great personal and professional cost, and his perseverance speaks to his sincere commitment to serving the greater good.

Many admired Professor Penington for his analytical mind and political astuteness, but his strategies were always centred first and foremost on people and communities. We extend our deepest condolences to Professor Penington's wife Dr Sonay Hussein and extended family at this difficult time.

We at Penington Institute will strive to continue his important work to reduce harm.



# A Message from the Chair

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**Kathryn Greiner AO**  
Chair

**Improving policy responses to drug use can feel like a slow and arduous task, but for those who are hard at work on these issues, there is hardly a moment's pause. The developments that make headlines may be few and far between, but behind those breakthroughs are untold hours of discussion, knowledge sharing, community engagement, negotiations and research that aim to improve community understanding of the issues and offer evidence based responses.**

The people behind Penington Institute understand that it is this constant, daily effort that leads to cumulative impact, and in the time that I have been Chair of this organisation, there has never been a dull moment, much less a quiet year. Even so, 2022 has been exceptionally memorable, both for its triumphs and its sorrows.

In October the Australian Capital Territory became the first Australian jurisdiction to decriminalise possession of small amounts of illicit substances. By contrast the NSW Government, in their long-awaited response to the 2020 Ice Inquiry, disappointed many in the sector by making clear that they would not act on advice to decriminalise low-level drug use.

Meanwhile in the US, President Joe Biden turbocharged a small community initiative started in Australia more than 20 years ago when he proclaimed August 28 through September 3 as Overdose Awareness Week and recognised August 31 as Overdose Awareness Day. Even more encouraging, the inclusion of the term 'harm reduction' in a strategy statement from the US Office of National Drug Control Policy marked the first usage of this phrase in US drug policy.

International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) continued to break new ground in 2022, with over 800 events promoting understanding of these issues around the world and achieved extensive media

coverage. Released to coincide with IOAD in August, *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2022* and the inaugural *Global Overdose Snapshot* armed event organisers with hard facts to highlight the tragic scale of the ongoing overdose crisis and challenge global leaders to take action.

The December release of *Cannabis in Australia 2022*, a comprehensive review of Australia's current policies, attitudes, and trends relating to cannabis, also gained significant media traction. The report caught the attention of political actors and public figures in Australia and abroad, sparking vigorous public debate and cementing Penington Institute's position as a thought leader in the cannabis space.

Just days into the new year, we received distressing news. Emeritus Professor David Penington AC, Penington Institute's namesake and chief benefactor, died on 6 January 2023. One of Australia's leading public intellectuals, his passing represents an incalculable loss to the scientific community and to supporters of rational, evidence-based drug policy everywhere.

This Annual Review is dedicated to the memory of Professor Penington, whose legacy we strive to honour. We also give our thanks to Penington Institute's patrons, board, funders, staff, volunteers and advisory committee members, without whom our work would not be possible.

# A Message from the CEO

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**John Ryan**  
Chief Executive Officer

**As we close the chapter on another year, there are many achievements and milestones worth commemorating – and, as Kathryn has already touched upon, one major loss.**

The progress made by policy makers would not be possible without a well informed debate and Penington Institute has always sought to ensure relevant and accurate information is kept in the public eye.

In 2022 we published not one but two major new reports with *Cannabis in Australia* and the *Global Overdose Snapshot*, both of which were well received by the Australian and international communities. International Overdose Awareness Day, our most recognisable and far-reaching campaign, once again succeeded in bringing the overdose crisis out of the shadows and galvanising support for evidence-based drug policy around the world.

Our workforce development team provided training to hundreds of frontline workers, building their capacity to respond to overdose. They also provided adhoc capacity building consultations, online and in person, to many more.

Australia's frontline NSP and healthcare workforce continued to be supported with relevant and up-to-date information through the publication of 11 issues of *The Bulletin*. To date, this publication has

been provided with the support of the Australian Government and offered engaging, insightful and practical commentary on drug related issues to the workers most exposed to its consequences. We are currently in discussion with the new Federal Government to ensure their ongoing support for this important initiative.

This Annual Review was already well underway when we received word in January 2023 of the death of David Penington. Unparalleled in his contribution to Australian public health policy and fearless in his championing of rational, evidence-based responses to drug use, his death is a terrible blow.

To those who knew Professor Penington – myself included – the news is of course deeply saddening. He was courageous, generous and always concerned for the most vulnerable. It was my great privilege to learn from him, to be guided by his unmatched intellect and to have enjoyed his support, both personally and professionally.

This year's Annual Review is dedicated to the memory of David Penington. In supporting rational drug policy that prioritises public health and improves community safety, we continue his work and hope to do justice to his legacy.



## Reducing Overdose

# International Overdose Awareness Day

2022 marked one decade since Penington Institute became the convenor of International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD).

This year, we recorded more than 810 events and an astonishing diversity of event formats. Events included candlelight vigils, mass public demonstrations, distribution of naloxone and fentanyl test strips, and even water balloon fights.

An online survey of campaign and event organisers found that 99 per cent of respondents rated their event as successful and many held high hopes for more impactful events in 2023.

“

I would like my event next year to be bigger and better. The lives lost are not just statistics, they were sons, daughters, siblings, moms and dads.

– Event organiser, USA

## Highlights from around the Globe

**United States** – President Joe Biden formally proclaimed August 28–September 3 2022 as Overdose Awareness Week.

**Canada** – An exemption to Controlled Drugs and Substances Act in British Columbia means adults will not be subject to criminal charges for possession of small amounts of certain illegal drugs.

**India** – The Manipur State AIDS Control Society identified 25 government hospitals to provide treatment facilities for drug overdose.

**The Philippines** – Training and education sessions were held by not-for-profit organisation to reduce stigma of those affected by overdose.

**New Zealand** – The New Zealand Drug Foundation called on the government to support a three-year pilot of an overdose prevention centre in Auckland.

**Myanmar** – Kisumu Network of People who Use Drugs organised awareness-raising events and training on overdose prevention for community members, local influencers, and village administrators.

**Zimbabwe** – Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network called on the government to share information with communities about overdose.

810+ EVENTS  
20+ LANGUAGES  
30+ COUNTRIES



Image: 'A Walk to Remember' - an IOAD 2022 event  
Casa Grande, Arizona US

Reducing Overdose

# International Overdose Awareness Day

## Expanding our Reach in 2022

This year, there was a strong increase in social media and traditional media coverage, helping us to broaden our reach with the critical overdose messaging for IOAD.

Mentions of the term 'International Overdose Awareness Day' across print, digital and broadcast media were 69 per cent higher than the previous year for the period July to mid-September.

IOAD 2022 was reported on across 39 countries, in at least 13 languages. Moreover, 84 per cent of IOAD events were covered by at least one form of media.

A steady stream of social activity throughout the year peaked on August 31 reaching a potential audience of 170 million people.

32K MEDIA MENTIONS

376K WEBSITE VISITS

25K SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Help us make IOAD bigger and better in 2023 by following us



@overdoseawarenessday



@OverdoseDay



@InternationalOverdoseAwarenessDay

#EndOverdose #OverdoseAware #IOAD23

## Reducing Overdose

# Australia's Annual Overdose Report

***Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2022* revealed that overdose deaths continue to exceed the road toll in Australia and that the gap is growing. In 2022, total overdose deaths were nearly double the number of land transport deaths.**

This year, Penington Institute expanded *Australia's Annual Overdose Report (AAOR)* to include information on non-fatal overdoses, including detailed analysis of drug-related hospitalisations and ambulance callouts. Given that non-fatal drug overdoses far outnumber fatal ones every year, their inclusion helps to give a more complete picture of overdose in Australia.

AAOR remains a key pillar of our work to improve community understanding of drugs and promote sensible community approaches to drug use issues. It continues to reach a diverse audience, including government agencies, law enforcement officials, and medical professionals, who use it for capacity building, service planning, and policy development.



**With so many lives lost, so many more at risk, and the solutions within our grasp, 2022 must be the year we decide that one more overdose death is too many.**

– John Ryan, CEO

## Media Coverage

Media coverage of the AAOR reached an estimated 3.7 million people. The report was featured in the Daily Telegraph, [ABC](#), SBS World News, [The Guardian](#) and more, which indicates AAOR's reputation as the most authoritative source of information about overdose deaths in Australia.



## Global Overdose Snapshot

Alongside AAOR, Penington Institute also published the inaugural [Global Overdose Snapshot](#) in 2022. This snapshot provides a succinct overview of drug consumption and overdose trends around the world. It finds that skyrocketing overdose deaths are merely the visible tip of the iceberg, while the true scale of this health crisis is hidden beneath layers of stigma, fear, and a lack of reliable data.



\*The data we draw on to create *Australia's Annual Overdose Report* goes through stages of revision and may not be finalised for several years. To present the most accurate possible picture of overdose in Australia, the period covered in the report is always two years prior to the year in which the report is released. Hence AAOR 2022 covers the calendar year 2020.

**Download the Report**

# Overdose Response Training

In 2023, the dissemination of naloxone in Victoria will transition away from a voucher-based system to one where Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) workers will be able to provide naloxone directly to clients.

Under the regulations of this new system, NSPs are recognised as Alternative Authorised Services, and NSP workers are required to undergo Penington Institute's Community Overdose Prevention Education (COPE) training and successfully complete the post-training assessment.

In 2022, our workforce development team delivered COPE trainings to more than 560 NSP workers from more than 32 NSP sites across Victoria, and another eight health and community service organisations.

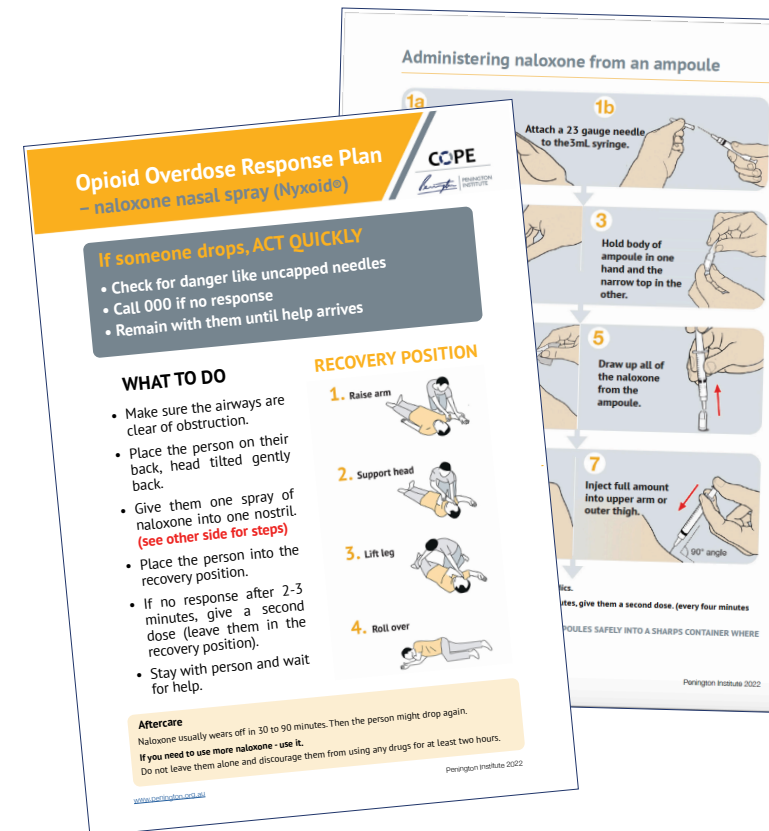
Naloxone saves lives and Penington Institute remains committed to training workers to be confident when handling, educating and discussing naloxone with clients. Through our COPE training, we enhance their understanding of overdose and naloxone and build their capacity to reduce drug-related harm.

## Other Training

Penington Institute offers workforce development in community settings and the healthcare sector, as well as law enforcement, justice, hospitality, local government and many others.

Our programs provide managers and frontline workers with the knowledge and skills to deliver the best service for people who use drugs and for those affected by drugs.

Training often takes the form of direct, adhoc consultations with individuals or small groups. In 2022, our workforce development team delivered upwards of 100 such capacity building consultations.



As part of the COPE training push, Penington Institute's existing suite of overdose response resources were updated in consultation with peer workers and the Department of Health.

# Improving the Management of Cannabis in the Community

## Cannabis in Australia 2022 Report

**Penington Institute published its inaugural Cannabis in Australia 2022 report, marking a milestone in its work to improve community understanding about drugs and promote sensible community approaches to drug use issues.**

The report presents findings from many months of research and interviews with around 100 experts spanning the healthcare and criminal justice sectors, researchers and policy advocates, the legal cannabis industry, consumers and government officials.

It objectively analyses how different forms of cannabis are managed in Australia, including the strengths and limitations of each approach, and the costs – both economic and social – of cannabis criminalisation to our communities.



**We are at a critical point now, where there is opportunity to drive long-overdue reform, and ease the transition from the outdated and harmful drug war approach toward a better-informed and healthier community.**

– John Ryan, CEO (in The Age)

The release of *Cannabis in Australia 2022* constitutes the second phase in Penington Institute's National Cannabis Project, following our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Use of Cannabis in Victoria in 2021.

### Media Coverage

The Cannabis in Australia 2022 report received strong media coverage both nationally and internationally. Media outlets included [Forbes](#), [The Age](#), [The Sydney Morning Herald](#), [The Australian](#), [The Guardian](#), and the [Brisbane Times](#).

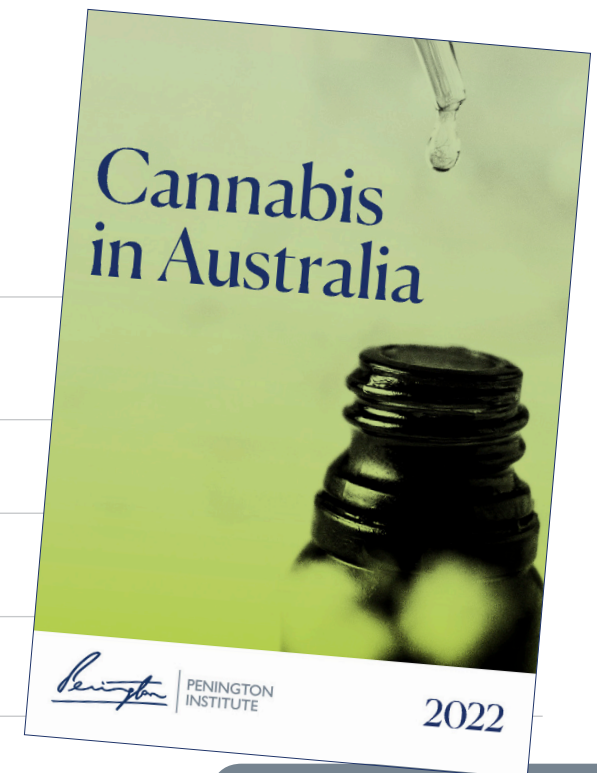
Forbes

The  
Guardian

THE AUSTRALIAN

The Sydney Morning Herald

cannabiz





## Improving Knowledge about Better Approaches to Drug Use Issues

# The Bulletin

In 2022, Penington Institute published 11 issues of *The Bulletin*, Australia's pre-eminent forum to inform frontline NSP workers.

Funded to publish entirely online, we have made the most of the magazine's digital format. Since August 2022, *The Bulletin* has been published as an interactive online flipbook, with embedded videos and other media used to add vividness to the written content.

*The Bulletin* is intended for a national audience, and we prioritise content that is representative of – and accessible to – a diverse readership. Stories this year included groundbreaking medical trials, policy and sector updates, and investigations of drug use and treatment for people with complex health and social needs.

In creating *The Bulletin*, we receive guidance from two working groups: *The Bulletin* Advisory Panel, a panel of 55 frontline workers, peer workers and others with a connection to drug-related issues; and *The Bulletin* Editorial Advisory Committee, which consists of representatives from the health departments of all eight Australian states and territories.



“

I like to read *The Bulletin* to keep up-to-date with issues affecting PWID. As well as get recent and relevant information regarding services, treatments etc.

I'm an academic researcher focused on alcohol and other drugs. *The Bulletin* gives me a sense of what's happening in the sector and service provision.

[There is] nothing else there like it for the sector.

– Quotes from stakeholder interviews in an independent review by National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA)<sup>i</sup>

i. Kostadinov, V., Bartram, A. & Bowden, J. (2022). Evaluation of *The Bulletin*: Final Report. Adelaide: National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute, Flinders University.

Improving Knowledge about Better Approaches to Drug Use Issues

# Victorian Harm Reduction Network

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**Penington Institute hosts regular meetings of the Victorian Harm Reduction Network (HRN). Due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, HRN meetings were adapted from in-person gatherings to fortnightly online meetings, which has allowed an average of more than 50 participants to attend.**

The HRN meetings are joined by attendees from across metropolitan and regional Victoria. Through the HRN meetings, Penington Institute enhances connections and facilitates engagement among the Victorian harm reduction workforce and other key stakeholders and provides learning and development opportunities on relevant topics. Through knowledge sharing, the HRN increases the capacity and capabilities of the Victorian NSP workforce.

The HRN is one dimension of Penington Institute's workforce development offerings, along with in-person and online trainings and web-based content.

## Replacement of NSP Information System in Victoria

**In light of the imminent national roll out of the Take Home Naloxone program, in 2021 it was surmised that the Needle and Syringe Program Information System (NSPIS) then in use throughout Victoria use was not capable of capturing the information required for data collection and reporting.**

It was further decided that the gaps in the legacy system could not be patched, and that it would need to be replaced with an entirely new system to meet requirements.

Penington Institute sat on the Project Steering Committee and helped guide the development and implementation of the new system. This project involved a transition from a paper-based system to a web-based NSP portal and coincided with the Victorian NSP Guidelines being updated for the first time in over a decade.

**To receive HRN updates  
and invites, please contact  
[info@penington.org.au](mailto:info@penington.org.au)**

# Sexual Health and Safety at Festivals Toolkit

In February 2022, Penington Institute launched the Sexual Health and Safety at Festivals Toolkit. This resource, developed in consultation with music industry representatives, sexual health experts and festival harm reduction teams, supports festival organisers to minimise health and safety risks to patrons.

Research has shown that young people who attend Australian music and dance festivals consume alcohol and other drugs at higher rates than young people in the general community, increasing the risk of unsafe sex, sexually transmitted diseases and blood-borne virus, and sexual violence. The Toolkit works to empower festival organisers with the knowledge necessary to promote sexual health and safety at their events, within the context of alcohol and other drug use.

The Toolkit is available both electronically as a PDF and in hard copy. It is accompanied by six fact sheets on topics such as sexual consent and bystander intervention. Music festivals offer a unique opportunity to reach young people with positive messaging and information to empower them to make safer choices regarding sex and the use of alcohol and other drugs.

“

Victorians have demonstrated a great collective spirit over these past two years. As people begin to make the most of festivals and entertainment being back in action, this Toolkit is paramount to ensuring they can do so in a safe environment.

– Josh Bull MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Victoria



# Governance & Financials

## Boards & Committees

Penington Institute is governed by its Board with the vital support of the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee and the Communications Advisory Group.

Our work is further supported by the following advisory committees:

- Australia's Annual Overdose Report Advisory Committee
- National Cannabis Project Advisory Committee
- The Bulletin Editorial Committee
- The Bulletin Advisory Panel

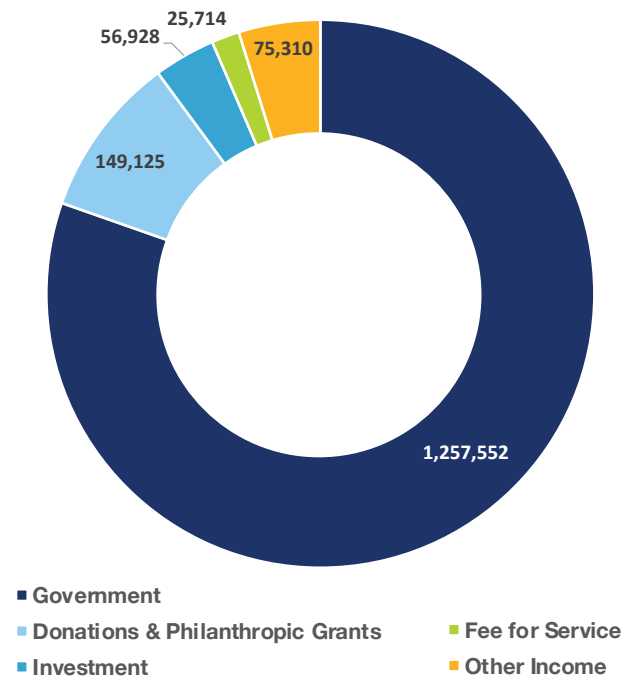
We are grateful for the support and guidance provided by each of these groups.

## Financials

Penington Institute earned \$1.56 million in revenue from its programs, funders, and donors in 2021/2022.

Accounting firm Crowe Audit Australia externally audits Penington Institute's annual financial statements.

Penington Institute revenue 2021–2022



## Our Funding Partners

Penington Institute would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to our funding partners. It is through the support of these partnerships that we can work towards our vision of seeing communities that are safe, healthy, and empowered to manage substance use.

### Government

- Victorian Government Department of Health
- Australian Government Department of Health

### Organisations

- Camurus AB
- Terumo Australia
- Indivior
- Masimo Foundation

### Major donors

The late Professor David Penington AC

# Support our Work

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Our ambitions for 2023 are suitably large as we continue to address complex issues related to substance use in our communities.

To support Penington Institute, please follow us on social media, learn more about our work on our website, or reach out to us to discover partnership, volunteer, and funding opportunities.



[penington.org.au](https://penington.org.au)



[@PeningtonNews](https://twitter.com/PeningtonNews)



[/company/penington-institute/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/penington-institute/)



[info@penington.org.au](mailto:info@penington.org.au)

## Donate to Penington Institute

We warmly welcome contributions of all sizes.

To donate, reach out to us or visit our website:  
[penington.org.au/donate/](https://penington.org.au/donate/)





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Image: 'A Walk to Remember' - an IOAD 2022 event  
Casa Grande, Arizona US