

Media Release

INJECTING FACILITIES ONE PIECE OF COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

"If there is one overriding message that should be emphasised from visits to Frankfurt's crisis care and injecting facilities, it would be that any approach to dealing with an street drug scene requires an inclusive, multi-faceted combination of solutions working together," says Dr Moodie, reflecting on the second leg of an intensive drug fact finding mission.

In discussions with individuals from the City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, the police and crisis centre personnel, it became clear that injecting facilities are only one small part of the overall solution.

"I think it is interesting that during each of our visits, individuals focused on the importance of working together and teamwork. This reinforced the idea that getting services and sectors all working together is central to the success of any drug reform program.

According to Moodie, services for users such as the crisis centres operating in Frankfurt, need to include shelter, medical treatment, needle and syringe exchanges with a focus on increasing return of needles/syringes, street outreach, work projects, facilities for the homeless, methadone and other substitute therapies and supervised injecting facilities.

"Unfortunately here in Victoria far too much focus has been placed on an either or scenario - either we only have injecting rooms or we have to approach the problem only through policing and law enforcement. The debate has been polarised on these two issues and we are not moving forward with our efforts to deal with the big issues of eliminating the street drug scene."

"These services require the support and continued commitment of local councils, business and industry and the police. Injecting facilities are not mutually exclusive of other programs."

"Consider that in Frankfurt, facilities were offering a combination of services focusing on primary health care, medical treatment, and counselling for five years before injecting facilities were integrated into the package of services. These facilities are a complementary part of these package of services, but should not operate in isolation."

"Our visits to these sorts of facilities and programs provide us with concrete examples of effective models for rehabilitation and treatment."

"But what is also useful to take away from this visit was the notion that these programs operate as an integral part of the community's overall comprehensive drug strategy."

"Certainly the effectiveness of any local drug strategy is underpinned by strong community support and the broader service systems in which they will operate. In Frankfurt, these programs have been highly successful in eliminating a significant open drug scene."

"Consider that in 1992, over 1000 users would congregate daily in a park situated in the centre of the city. Frankfurt had a huge open drug scene. Since then, the fact that the open drug has been virtually shut down from this area has helped to garner a high degree of community acceptance and support for initiatives such as the establishment of injecting facilities."

"According to Mr Weise a senior police official in Frankfurt it was only after services were put in place for this population to provide an alternative place for users to go, were the police successful in closing down this drug scene."

Frankfurt's heroin death rates have declined as the result of a number of associated factors, including the closing down of the open drug scene, the provision of services such as housing, access to medical treatment, substitution therapies and injecting facilities, combined with a decreasing number of users and new recruits.

Working in isolation, no one program or initiative will make a major difference without the support of other policies, programs and strong community participation. Continuing improvements to treatment and rehabilitation, education and law enforcement must accompany and reinforce a local drug strategy."

"There is certainly lots we can take away from our visits to both LA and Frankfurt. There is a range of options available, but any approach we take must have bipartisan support. If not, it will be more difficult to make any long lasting inroads and progress."

The Frankfurt visit is part of an investigation of different international approaches to dealing with unregulated drugs of addiction. VicHealth CEO Dr Rob Moodie, together with Shadow Health Minister, Robert Doyle and Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Bruce Mildenhall are examining new measures in primary and secondary prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, policing and law enforcement and managing the open drug scene in Los Angeles, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Bern and Zurich.

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