



“There is no safe way or place to take illicit drugs”

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY IS WORKING. SAYS CHRISTOPHER PYNE

ECSTASY is a dangerous psychotropic hallucinogenic stimulant, usually cut with hydrochloric acid.

It can lead to overheating and dehydration, unsafe sexual practices, medium and long-term mental health concerns including depression, and potentially death.

Some drug law reform advocates would have you believe that the Government should allow “pill testing” at rave parties so that drug users can take their pills, comforted by the knowledge that whatever they’re taking hasn’t been accidentally spiked by rat poison or something even more dangerous.

It is a fanciful dream to believe that any illicit drug is safe. An overwhelming majority of the Australian community would understand that by sending the message that a pill can be “safe”, the pill-testers would be putting young people at rave parties in more danger by encouraging them to experiment.

My description of ecstasy in the opening paragraph is a description of the pill that would pass the pill-testers’ examination.

Pill testing at rave parties is just one of a range of “trendy” answers that are thrown up from time to time in the debate about what to do about drugs.

The NSW Government continues to operate a largely discredited heroin injecting room. If you’re to believe what you read in the newspapers, the room has an alarmingly low rate of users entering into rehabilitation or treatment programs. In fact it would seem the room is now a refuge for other drug takers, with 8 per cent of visitors injecting the particularly insidious drug, ice.

The Federal Government has a

commonsense approach to dealing with illicit substances. We have a zero tolerance approach towards drug taking, drug dealing and any practice that sends the message that drug taking is somehow acceptable or tolerated.

There is no safe way, no safe level, and no safe place to take illicit drugs.

We also fund rehabilitation and diversion programs designed to help drug addicts to get off the drugs and get on with their lives. To not do so would be negligent. We can walk and

chew gum at the same time. Since John Howard launched the *Tough on Drugs* campaign in 1997, the Government has committed more than \$1.4 billion to a whole range of measures designed to fight the scourge of drugs in our community.

These measures encompass three main strategies:

A STRONG law enforcement component – to reduce the illegal supply of drugs into our country, to catch and imprison dealers within Aust-

ralia, and to intercept the drugs before they get onto the street.

POSITIVE public education campaigns – particularly aimed at ensuring that young people are fully informed about the risks and dangers associated with all drug taking.

TREATMENT and rehabilitation for addicts – to ensure those who have been affected by drug use are able to return to the community, lead fulfilling lives and make productive contributions again to society.

The campaign has had strong successes. Drug use is falling; the proportion of people aged 14 and over who had used illicit drugs in the previous 12 months fell from 22 per cent in 1998 to 15.3 per cent in 2004. Deaths from heroin overdose have fallen from 1116 in 1999 to 374 in 2005.

A poll of young people released by the Australian Democrats this week showed that of the 15 to 19-year-olds polled there was a 10 per cent drop since last year in those who had tried cannabis.

The *Australian Secondary Schools Survey* paints a similar picture with the number of 12 to 17-year-olds using cannabis on a weekly basis dropping from 11 per cent in 1996 to 4 per cent in 2005. The number of 12 to 17-year-olds who have tried cannabis in their lifetime has dropped from 35 per cent in 1996 to 18 per cent in 2005. And if they’re not using cannabis at school they’re much less likely to graduate to harder drugs.

The Government’s drugs campaign has been designed to get families talking about drugs, recognising that parents are in the best position to raise the subject of illicit drugs and educating their children about the dangers.

If offered an illicit substance, young people need to have a strategy of how to say no, and parents can help prepare their kids for that.

Figures from the 2001 *National Illicit Drugs Campaign* showed 78 per cent of parents began a dialogue with their children about drugs as a result of the campaign. This is paying dividends today.

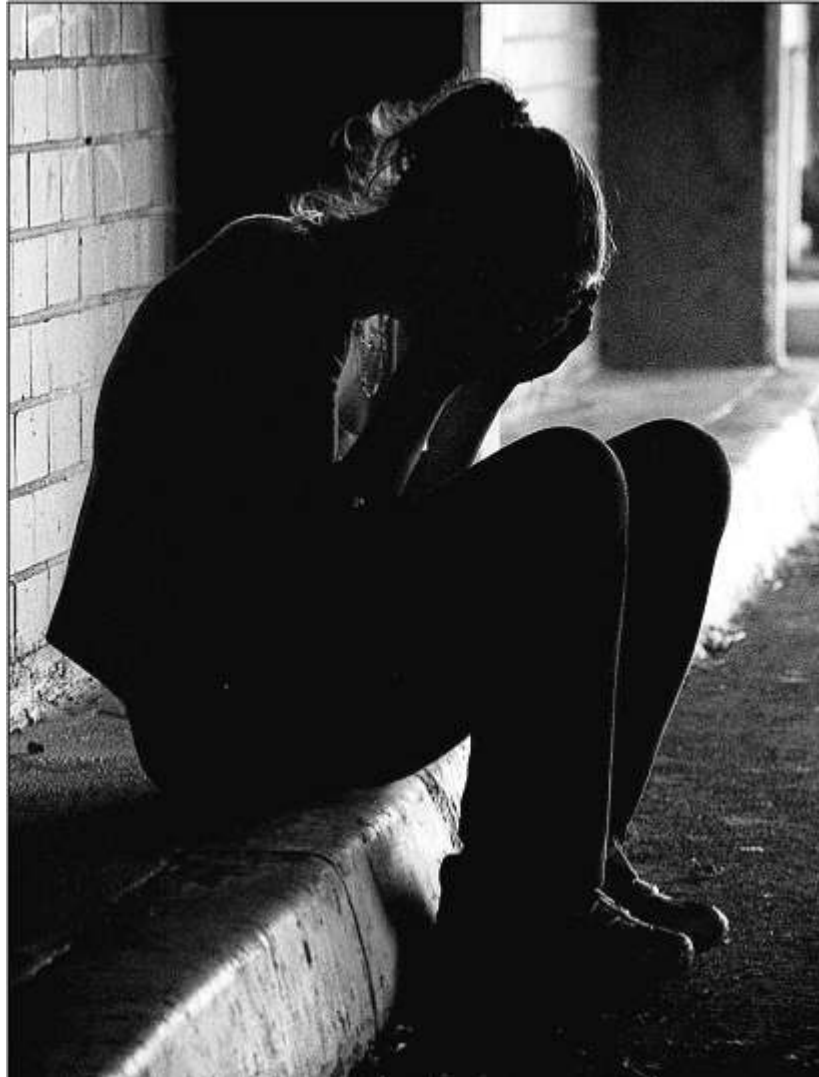
In this year’s Federal Budget we have allocated funds to send all parents in Australia an updated booklet with all the facts they need to help them talk to their children about drugs, including ice.

Kids are getting the message that using drugs isn’t cool. I look forward to the trendy public policy advocates learning that sometimes the old ideas are the best.





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