

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

8 August 2017

Church Community Service Providers Commend ALP's Sensible Stand Against Drug Test Trial

UnitingCare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia and Anglicare have today commended the ALP for its commitment to oppose the Government's proposed drug testing trial of social security recipients and calls on other Members and Senators to do the same.

"We welcome the ALP's willingness to listen to the concerns of medical experts and community organisations like our own who every day work with the disadvantaged, including those suffering from addictions.

"We call on the Government to drop plans to implement this measure and instead focus on improved health services to support some of the most vulnerable members of our community," the community service leaders said.

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little said the trial was concerning on a number of fronts.

"There is no evidence that this measure will change behaviour, and we believe it will only serve to further marginalise, vilify and drive those battling with addiction further into poverty.

"In our view, and based on evidence and research, the proposed measures will not result in the positive behavioural change or economic efficiencies that the Government anticipates," she said.

The leaders noted that the Bill (Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017) incorporates a number of positive measures including the streamlining of components of the welfare system to reduce complexity and improve accessibility.

"However, we highlight our significant concerns around several initiatives that impose unnecessarily harsh penalties for vulnerable job seekers, including the establishment of the drug testing trial," they said.

Fr Frank Brennan, CEO of Catholic Social Services, said mandatory drug test regimes which are proven failures do not respect the dignity of people afflicted with drug addiction.

"This measure will stigmatize and punish drug users by compulsory testing and changing the way their welfare payments are managed.

"We know from our own *Dropping off the Edge* research that people receiving social security payments often have a range of other issues individually, within their households or across the community that contribute to entrenching disadvantage.

"Dealing with the drug or alcohol addiction by itself without an understanding of the broader issues affecting the person such as mental health, housing, transport and household budget stress will not address the underlying causes and effects of the addiction," he said.

Anglicare Australia's Acting Executive Director Roland Manderson called on the crossbench to reject the proposal.

"With no expert support and no plans to ensure rehabilitation services, the drug testing regime will only do more harm," Mr Manderson said.

“The countries that have trialled random drug testing have found that it’s costly and doesn’t achieve anything. In the US, it has cost up \$1600 USD per person.

“There is no evidence that these tests work. The Government itself has admitted that. It’s now up to the crossbench to look at the evidence and reject these changes.

“This plan has been rejected in Britain, rejected in Canada, and it ought to be rejected here.”

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

UnitingCare Australia: Gerard Delaney Ph 0413 274 176

Catholic Social Services: Lil Bryant-Johnson Ph 0450 302020

Anglicare: Maiy Aziz Ph 0434 200 794