



KINGS CROSS MEDICALLY SUPERVISED INJECTING CENTRE

Wednesday 15 September, 2010

The NSW Government will remove the “trial status” of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre and formalise the facility.

As a trial, it has been subject to extensive evaluations and over the last nine years, it has been the subject of a number of independent evaluations, including by BOCSAR, KPMG, UNSW and SAHA International.

The legislation, to be brought forward by NSW Health Minister Carmel Tebbutt will guarantee continued stringent monitoring of the Centre and that it will remain the only legalised injecting centre in the State.

It will also undergo regular statutory evaluations every five years, an independent evaluation after four years, and NSW Health will continue to conduct routine inspections of the centre.

The NSW Police Commissioner and Director-General of Health also retain the authority to immediately revoke the Centre’s license - if ever deemed necessary.

The centre will remain the subject of normal health reviews and monitoring as would any other government program or treatment regime.

The Centre has had nine years of successful trials and extensive monitoring. Independent evaluation by KPMG found the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre has:

- Successfully managed 3,426 overdose-related events;
- Helped more than 12,000 injecting drug users;
- Referred more than 8,500 drug users for help, including 3,870 to drug treatment;
- Distributed more than 300,000 clean needles and syringes to users; and
- Helped reduce the proportion of local residents who report seeing public injecting from 55 per cent in 2000 to 27 per cent in 2010.

Dr Don Weatherburn, director of BOCSAR (Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research), found in a recent report on the impact of the Centre on drug-related crime in Kings Cross, that there was no evidence the Centre was a ‘honey pot’ for local drug crime.

“The Medically Supervised Injection Centre has not had a negative impact on robbery, property crime or drug offences in Kings Cross LAC [Local Area Command].”

The Centre arose from the 1999 Drug Summit and has operated at Kings Cross since May 2001. It is run by Uniting Care NSW.

Formalising the facility could free up to \$150,000 from evaluation funds and this could increase the number of centre methadone places at the Kings Cross Langton Centre that has proved to be the most effective referral to treatment mechanism to date for this group of people.

The Centre monitors on-site injecting of drugs, and provides emergency help when needed, as well as medical advice, support and counselling services.

Consecutive independent reviews of the centre showed that it has met its objectives of:

- Reducing drug overdoses and deaths;
- Providing a gateway to treatment and counseling;
- Reducing public injection and the problem of discarded needles; and
- Reducing blood borne disease such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

The Centre's operation is funded from confiscated proceeds of crime. No funding is diverted from treatment programs.

Premier Kristina Keneally today made the announcement about the future of the Centre with Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, Carmel Tebbutt.

“Since 2001, this facility has helped reduce overdoses, save lives, help drug users get treatment, and reduce the spread of disease,” Ms Keneally said.

“The Centre was a ground breaking initiative from former Premier Bob Carr, and today I'm taking the next step: moving to end its ongoing trial status, and give it certainty.

“The Centre has referred thousands of people for help, distributed hundreds of thousands of needles, and reduced instances of public injecting,” Ms Keneally said.

“The Centre has made a positive difference to people's lives, including Kings Cross residents, and that's why we want to provide it with more certainty.

“That said, we recognise there are strong views on this issue, and will continue the strong regime of monitoring, measuring and evaluating the facility.

“Under the legislation, the Government would ask the Police Commissioner and Director-General of NSW Health to continue to oversee the Centre.”

Ms Tebbutt said the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre had been instrumental in reaching marginalised and long-term drug users who do not engage in treatment.

“In establishing the Centre as a trial, the Government recognised something had to be done to provide users in the area with better help and support,” Ms Tebbutt said.

“Many of the people the facility reaches are homeless, jobless, recently out-of-prison, or suffering mental health problems.

“Through the Centre, we are providing much needed help to the people most at risk from overdose death, disease and street violence.

“Throughout the trial, the Centre has been successful in decreasing overdose deaths and helping users access treatment.

“In its recent review, KMPG found that 40 per cent of drug users had not sought drug treatment before using the Centre.”

Ms Tebbutt thanked the Reverend Harry Herbert, Executive Director of Uniting Care NSW/ACT, the Centre's medical director, Dr Marianne Jauncey, and previous directors, Dr Ingrid van Beek and Dr Hester Wilson for their leadership of the Centre.

“In particular, I wish to thank the workers at the Centre who have saved lives and helped people get their lives back on track after long periods of addiction,” Ms Tebbutt said.

Background notes: Medically Supervised Injecting Centre

- The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre monitors on-site injecting of drugs, and provides emergency help when needed, as well as medical advice, support and counselling services.
- The Centre has been operating in Kings Cross since May 2001. Uniting Care NSW has been licensed to operate the facility.
- The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre is the sole such facility in Australia. There are about 90 similar Centres around the world including in Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Canada and Norway.
- People who are pregnant, intoxicated or under 18 years of age are not allowed to use the Centre.
- The trial of the Centre emerged from the 1999 NSW Drug Summit, which was convened by former Premier Bob Carr to look at approaches to tackle drug abuse, drug crime and related impacts that had been rising through the 1990s.
- The legislation to establish the medically supervised injecting centre was not a conscience vote for the ALP – and it will not be again.
- The purpose of the trial is to reach marginalised and long-term injecting drug users who had either unsuccessfully tried treatment or had never sought treatment before.
- The NSW Government's objectives for the trial were that it:
 - Decrease drug overdose deaths;
 - Provide a gateway into treatment and counselling;
 - Reduce the problem of discarded needles and users injecting in public places; and
 - Help reduce the spread of diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C.
- An independent evaluation of the trial by KPMG found that:
 - The Centre has assisted more than 12,000 injecting drug users;
 - Staff have successfully managed 3,426 overdose-related events;
 - There have been over 8,500 referrals, including 3,870 to drug treatment;
 - More than 300,000 needles and syringes have been distributed to clients including on exit to support safe practices and reduce the risk of blood borne disease; and
 - The proportion of local residents who report seeing public injecting has fallen from 55 per cent in 2000 to 27 per cent in 2010.
- Clients of the Centre have been found to be long-term drug users, with the following characteristics:
 - About three quarters are male
 - Average age of 34 years, and
 - About three quarters reported having a mental health problem.
- Since being established in 2001 for an initial trial period of 18 months, the trial of the Centre has been extended three times. The current trial was due to run until 31 October, 2011.
- Following today's announcement, legislation will be introduced into NSW Parliament this session to make the Centre permanent.