



Police Federation
of Australia

The National Voice of Policing

ABN 31 384 184 778

Level 1, 21 Murray Crescent
GRIFFITH ACT 2603

Tel: (02) 6239 8900
Fax: (02) 6239 8999

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Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

le.committee@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into public communication campaigns targeting drug and substance abuse

The PFA represents the professional and industrial interests of in excess of 63,000 police officers across every police jurisdiction nationally and we thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

The PFA supports the current National Drugs Strategy and the National Drugs Campaign. While we advocate for strong law enforcement strategies to be an integral element of any anti-drugs campaign, we also strongly support a comprehensive communications arm, with specific focus on younger people. Such a strategy, we argue, must have a strong emphasis on digital communications as well as traditional advertising.

We further submit that any such communications strategy must have as a key element, a focus on recreational drug taking, including 'party drugs' and 'ice'. Such a strategy should highlight that a conviction for a criminal offence involving drugs may

cause inhibitors to future employment prospects in a range of areas and overseas travel to numerous countries. We further believe that any communications campaign should have a specific stream targeting parents and how they can support their children who may become involved in drugs or other substance abuse. The PFA further supports such communications strategies being tailored for Indigenous communities and culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

In respect to the issue of 'shock advertising' raised in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, while the PFA has no specific expertise in such campaign advertising, we specifically note the comments attributed to Siimon Reynolds, the architect of the successful 1987 anti-AIDS ads (page 3 of the Daily Telegraph on 27 November, 2019), where he is quoted as saying in respect to the NSW Department of Health's StayOK campaign around festival drug taking,

"The campaign seems to have given up telling people to not take drugs at festivals. It's basically saying go ahead but don't take too many".
Reynolds went on to say, "Most people say fear campaigns don't work on them. In fact, most people say advertising doesn't work on them. Neither is true".

"That's why it's a multi-billion dollar industry. Many countries use fear campaigns with great success, but they have to be cleverly done. My concern with this campaign is it simply won't get noticed. And therefore, its behavioural change message will be missed".

In an earlier article on 31 January 2019 in the Star Observer, Reynolds also compared the AIDS crisis to MDMA use and called for a similar campaign to prevent drug-related deaths.

Reynolds is quoted in that article as saying,

"There are quite a few parallels between the AIDS issue and the MDMA issue because back then people did not know they were in danger of getting AIDS. Today, people do not realise the dangers of MDMA,"

Whilst there are many detractors of such 'shock' advertising, it should be noted that over 30 years later, people are still talking about Reynolds' AIDS ads.

The PFA encourages the Committee to take advice from a range of subject matter experts in the advertising/marketing space, not just those in the law enforcement/criminology space, to ensure that it gets a broad range of views to assist in its development of recommendations from this Inquiry.

The PFA would be happy to appear before the Committee to elaborate on any other issues that the committee might deem important.

Sincerely yours

Scott Weber
Chief Executive Officer