

Mr Herschel Baker  
Queensland Director  
Drug Free Australia

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Dear Mr Baker

Thank you for your letter dated 14 August 2018 sent to the Premier of Queensland regarding my visit to Portugal and the report of the visit — *Portugal's response to drug-related harm*. The Queensland Mental Health Commission received your letter on 10 September 2018.

I appreciate you taking the time to share your views about the report, and for providing information about the Swedish and Icelandic approaches to alcohol and other drugs.

The Queensland Mental Health Commission is an independent statutory authority. Our role is to drive reform towards a more integrated, evidence-based, recovery-oriented mental health and substance misuse system. We work with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve the best possible quality of life for all Queenslanders through good mental health and wellbeing, and social and economic inclusion and participation.

In late May to early June 2018, I attended the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) exchange held in Stockholm. My attendance included participation in workshops with international mental health leaders and experts to discuss perinatal and infant mental health. Being in Europe provided an opportunity to visit Portugal to observe firsthand the country's response to illicit drug use. As the report notes, myself and other Queensland delegates met with key subject matter experts to better understand the risks and benefits of Portugal's approach. I am aware that decriminalisation of illicit drugs has been adopted to varying degrees in other countries including France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and some states of the United States of America. The Commission intends to explore a wide variety of approaches.

I recognise that drug law reform is a contentious issue and that there are divergent views about the best ways to address alcohol and other drug use in Australia. As you would be aware, all Australian states and territories are committed to reducing and preventing the harms associated with alcohol and other drugs. This commitment is encapsulated in the *National Drug Strategy 2017–2026*. The Commission's work is aligned to the national strategic framework and has adopted the three pillars of harm minimisation (demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction).

It is my view that open, robust, evidence-based discussions are required in Queensland about the benefits, disadvantages and implications of taking a criminal justice approach versus a health approach to people that have not committed a crime but have an addiction.

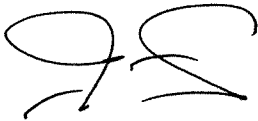
Our discussions should consider current evidence of what is working and what needs improvement to better address alcohol and other drug use in Queensland. This should include exploring innovative models and approaches operating within Australia and internationally to better inform our approach.

Through our research, and consultation with a wide range of government and non-government agencies, as well as individuals and family members with a lived experience of problematic alcohol and other drug use, we have heard widespread agreement that there needs to be a continued focus on prevention and early intervention, as well as diversion programs that appropriately divert people from the criminal justice system to the health care system.

The Commission is committed to engaging with a range of key stakeholders to explore ways to improve our approach to addressing alcohol and other drug use in Queensland. Thank you for contributing to this important discussion on how to best prevent and reduce the adverse impact of alcohol and other drugs on the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders.

I would be pleased to meet with you if you would like to discuss this matter further. Should you wish to meet please contact my Executive Assistant, Ms Cate Thompson, by telephone on (07) 3033 0328 to arrange a mutually convenient time.

Yours sincerely



**Ivan Frkovic**  
**Mental Health Commissioner**  
**Queensland Mental Health Commission**