



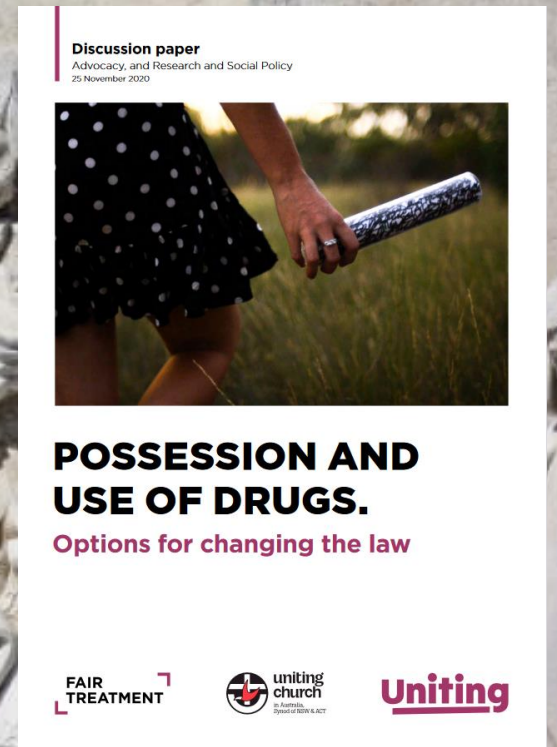
# Drug decriminalisation – exposing the mis/disinformation

Fact-checking the Uniting Church's Position – part 1

**DRUG  
FREE**  
AUSTRALIA

# Their claims

- the Uniting Church advocates for decriminalisation
  - we must recognise **mutuality** and **interdependence** between all people – p4
  - we must advocate for the user disadvantaged by **unjust drug laws** – p4
  - Not many drug users are **dependent** – p 7
  - Decriminalisation will allow drug-using parents **to better access help** to be better parents – p17



[http://web.archive.org/web/20210302044229/uniting.org/content/dam/uniting/documents/community-impact/research-and-innovation/discussion\\_paper\\_drug\\_possession.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20210302044229/uniting.org/content/dam/uniting/documents/community-impact/research-and-innovation/discussion_paper_drug_possession.pdf)



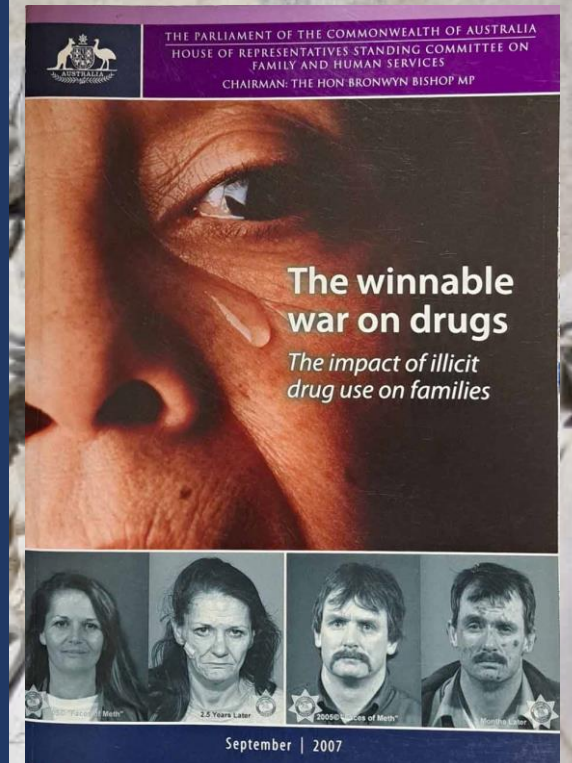


# Interdependence

- we first should reflection on the meaning of ‘harm reduction’ programs
  - by their very **nomenclature** they admit that illicit drugs do unacceptable harm
  - their focus is on **unacceptable harm** to the user
  - they **pretend** that no one else is harmed – that drug harms are a **private issue**

# Interdependence

- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **immediate family**
  - *“The family member’s problem is typically related to the drug use, but separate, such as:*
    - *I have no real relationship with my child;*
    - *All the family income goes on drugs;*
    - *My partner is not emotionally available to me;*
    - *I am scared to ask for my basic needs;*
    - *I am placing the needs of the addicted member above the needs of other family members;*
    - *My partner/child does not respect my home/my right to a peaceful/clean space; and*
    - *My friends no longer visit our house”*

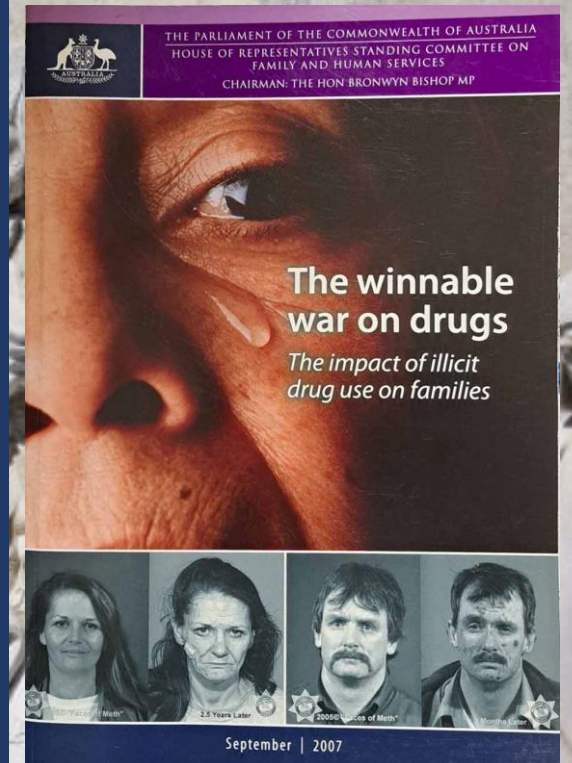


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# Interdependence

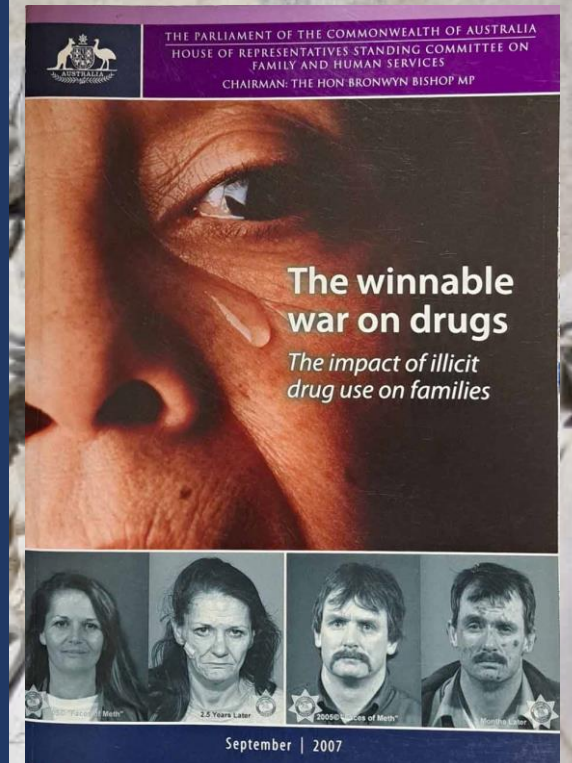
- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **children**
  - *"The impacts of parental drug use on growing children were related by many inquiry participants. They included:*
    - *inadequate nutrition and periods without food;*
    - *a lack of clothing;*
    - *inadequate health care, including a lack of immunisation,*
    - *lack of attention to the child's health problems or disabilities,*
    - *irregular washing, dental decay, a filthy home environment and untreated head lice;*
    - *poverty and financial disadvantage;*
    - *physical, sexual and emotional abuse;*
    - *family breakdown and conflict;*



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# Interdependence

- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **children**
  - *traumatic and frightening experiences, such as parents overdosing or losing consciousness;*
  - *parental mental health problems;*
  - *frequent change of residence and carers;*
  - *involvement in criminal activity;*
  - *poor education outcomes due to learning and behavioural difficulties and interruptions to schooling;*
  - *social problems, including social isolation and lack of attachment and connection to others; and*
  - *problems with emotional development”*

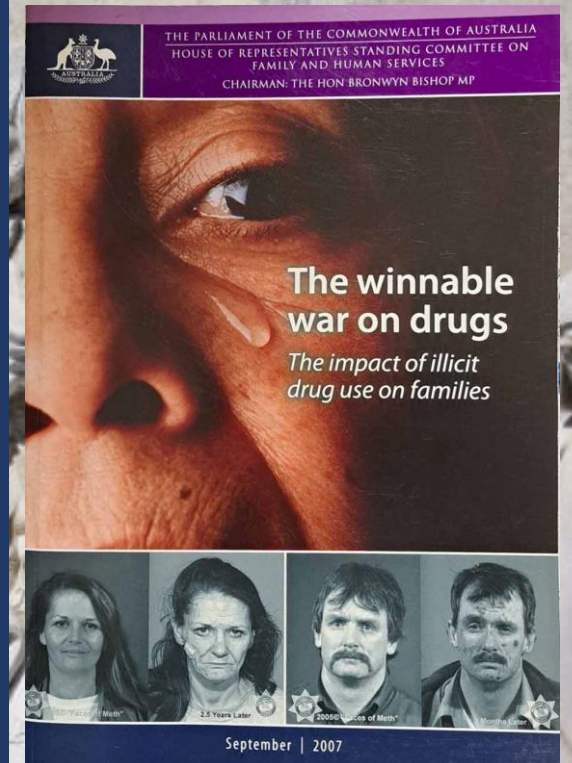


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# Interdependence

- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **grandparents**
  - *“Centrelink also reported that the transfer of family support payments along with care of the children was an issue. Grandparents who assumed care of the children were ‘emotionally blackmailed’ into not claiming the payments they were entitled to: Grandparents in particular, may be emotionally blackmailed by their child into NOT claiming or pursuing entitlement to a Centrelink payment so they are able to support grandchildren. Usually it is not until an extreme event occurs that grandparents or relatives eventually claim a payment. They are very aware that when they claim a payment, the parent’s payment will cease or be dramatically reduced and there will be work obligations for the parent of the child.”*



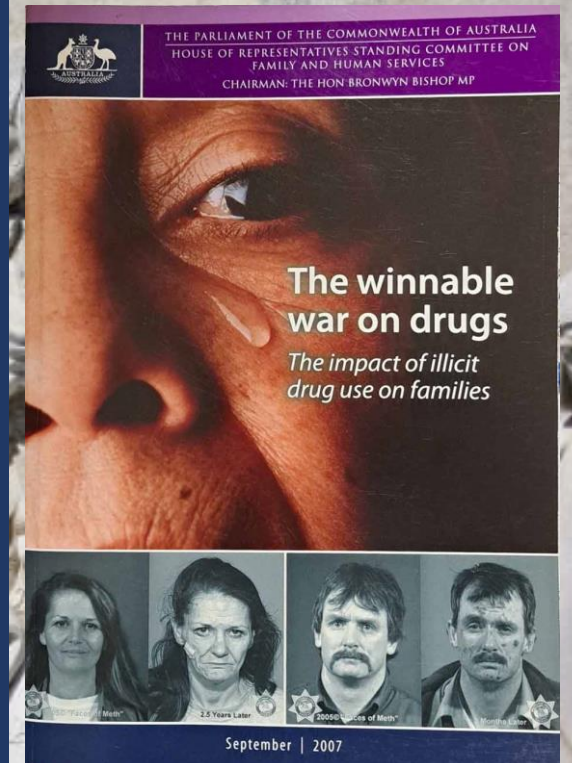
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# Interdependence

- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **siblings**

*“Unsurprisingly, one family member’s illicit drug use can often be the underlying cause of another’s health problems. Many report that they have needed counselling and treatment themselves to cope with depression and anxiety, or that they have developed chronic health conditions through failing to pay attention to their own health needs. The committee heard examples of where siblings also become drug users: a mother in Western Australia told the committee that four of her five children had been addicted to illicit drugs; once one of them had started using, the ‘family morality’ broke down and ‘the other children then saw it as being an okay thing to do.’*

*The financial costs to families can also be significant, with theft and property damage a common experience, as well as continual requests by users for loans to cover drug expenses and debts. Treatment, rehabilitation, and legal fees can mount into thousands of dollars. Families with a small business may find themselves unable to give it the necessary attention and focus, and others stop working or reduce working hours to look after the drug user or cope with their own problems. A family’s ability to earn income, take holidays and save for or enjoy retirement, is thus affected. Illicit drug use presents tremendous opportunity costs to users and their families.”*

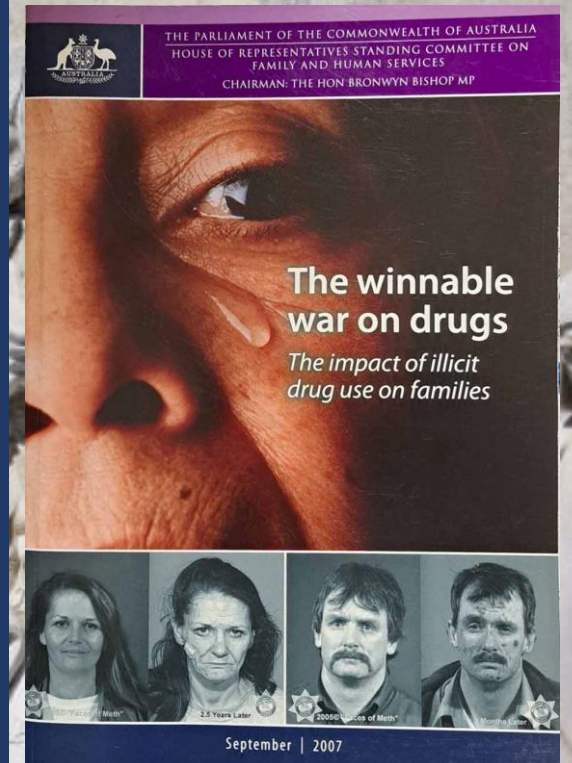


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# Interdependence

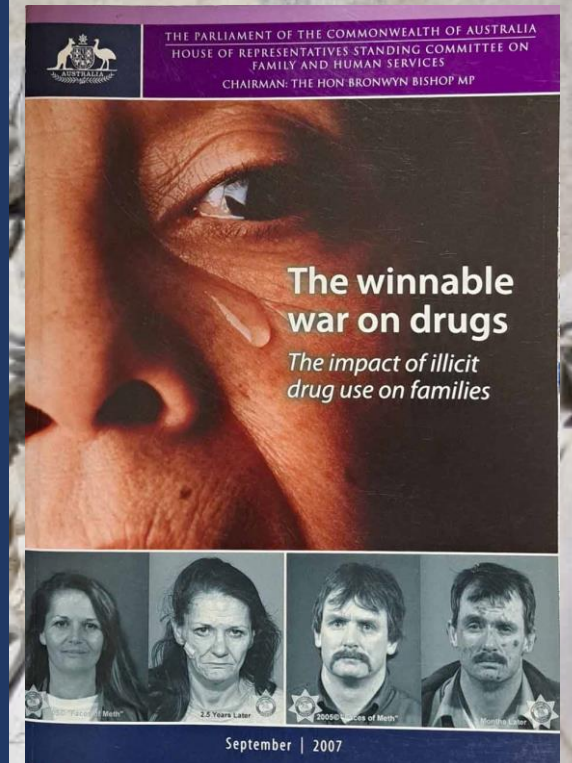
- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **friends**
  - *“Other siblings are often unable to have their friends visit the family home due to the unpredictability of the using member's behaviour. A mother told the committee that:  
As my son's behaviour and drug use escalated fewer family and friends came to visit our home or include us in social activities in case he came. We had little respite and on reflection as I write I can see my younger children locked themselves away in their rooms, no longer eating together as a family, no longer watching TV together or talking together. We would covet brief times together away from him to share school activities, illnesses, fear, loneliness or wonder where our belongings had gone to. Sometimes we would cry together, hug and just hope everything would change. For many years nothing changed except to worsen.*



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# Interdependence

- the constellation of people seriously affected by an individual's drug use – **workmates & road users**
  - *“In addition to the actual harm imposed on the community, the use of illicit drugs also contributes to a broad range of potential harms due to impairment associated with drug use. In 2004, of Australians aged 14 years and older who had used any illicit drugs in the last 12 months, in the same period:*
    - 581,000 people had driven a motor vehicle while under the influence of illicit drugs;
    - 115,000 people had operated a boat or hazardous machinery; and
    - 326,600 people had gone to work”



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# Unjust laws?

- grandparents give up life savings to look after grandchildren, as well as any hope of retirement
  - most countries and states criminalise shoplifting, with even small amounts stolen penalised
  - calculate the dollar value that is taken from compassionate grandparents and it is typically many multiples more than that stolen by shoplifters

# Few dependent?


## The evidence:

- *“The typical picture of an active heroin user is a dependent, long-term unemployed person, with a long history of treatment and relapse, and a history of imprisonment. Heroin is simply not the sort of drug that could be termed recreational because very few people use it in non-dependent, non-compulsive fashion.”*

*Shane Darke, Michael Farrell – The Conversation*

- 61% of Sydney injecting room clients are on social security (p70) and 10% involved in sex work (p 15), dispelling the myth of the functional drug user

KPMG 2010 evaluation – Sydney injecting room




The screenshot shows a KPMG article titled "THE CONVERSATION" with the subtitle "Academic rigour. Journalism flair". The article is dated February 7, 2014, at 2:33pm AEDT. The main headline is "Three persistent myths about heroin use and overdose deaths". Below the headline is a photograph of Philip Seymour Hoffman and a syringe. The article text discusses the death of Philip Seymour Hoffman and the persistence of myths about heroin use.

**THE CONVERSATION**  
Academic rigour. Journalism flair

Arts Books + Ideas Business + Economy Education Environment + Energy Health Politics Science + Tech

### Three persistent myths about heroin use and overdose deaths

Published: February 7, 2014 2:33pm AEDT



Philip Seymour Hoffman's death has caused old myths about heroin to come to the fore again. ANDREW GOMBERT/EPA

Philip Seymour Hoffman's death earlier this week from a suspected heroin overdose unleashed the usual media coverage of deaths related to this drug. While the actor's actual cause of death has not yet been determined, it's important to separate the truth from the myths about heroin use and overdose.

There are few areas as replete with myth as heroin use. Common misconceptions include that this is a problem of young people, that there are a large number of highly functioning "recreational" users of the drug, and that overdose deaths are due to variations in drug purity (or impurities).

The persistence of these myths is intriguing because research evidence from the past 40 years has repeatedly shown all of them to be false.

<https://theconversation.com/three-persistent-myths-about-heroin-use-and-overdose-deaths-22895>

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/aod/resources/Documents/msic-kpmg.pdf>





# Better parenting?

Illicit drug use creates chaotic lives, where better parenting is not even entertained

- it is not the illegality of drugs that cause the chaos, but the dependence on the drugs themselves



# Next episode

- In this series
  - The truth about Portugal
  - Increased drug use elsewhere
  - Fact-checking the Uniting Church's position
    - [part 1](#)
    - [part 2](#)
    - [part 3](#)
  - Why decriminalisation fails
  - Whose agenda is it?
  - More successful alternatives