



**HON JENNY MACKLIN MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES
MEMBER FOR JAGAJAGA**

**HON LINDA BURNEY MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR HUMAN SERVICES
MEMBER FOR BARTON**

PORTER SHELVES FLAWED DRUG TESTING POLICY

The Minister for Social Services, Christian Porter has suffered another failure with reports today indicating that the Turnbull Government will shelve its flawed plan to drug test social security recipients.

Every single expert has said that this is a bad policy that won't work.

A Senate Inquiry earlier this year heard overwhelming evidence from medical professionals, addiction specialists and community organisations against the proposed plan.

Mick Palmer, the Commissioner of Australian Federal Police from 1994-2001 has even said the flawed policy could see an increase in crime.

“It certainly hasn't got much chance of reducing crime. It does have the potential in some cases to aggravate it [crime].”

“All my experience tells me that this policy won't work, and what it will do is create more damage – and the most damage, and most harm to those people who are most vulnerable and most in need of support and protection.

“It's pretty stark that this can only aggravate an already pretty serious problem and make more vulnerable people who already need more help than they're now getting.”

Nobody doubts that we face significant problems with drug addiction in the community, but there is no evidence that this trial will work.

Labor formed its position after extensive consultation with experts - doctors, health professionals, addiction medicine specialists, community organisations and a former Australian Federal Police Commissioner all say it won't work.

The time has come for Mr Porter to listen to the experts and dump this expensive and flawed trial once and for all.

It's time for the Turnbull Government to properly invest in drug rehabilitation services that are proven to work.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY:

"At a time when we desperately need money for frontline services, it's being spent in a way all the available evidence tells us won't work."

"Doctors don't necessarily speak with a united voice — we're a very varied group of specialists and people with different backgrounds across the country, so when you do hear doctors speaking with a united voice I think people should listen."

- **Dr Marianne Jauncey, from the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs**

"Existing evidence shows drug testing welfare recipients is not an effective way of identifying those who use drugs and it will not bring about behaviour change. It is an expensive, unreliable and potentially harmful testing regime to find this group of people."

- **Dr Adrian Reynolds, Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)**

"It's an absolute disgrace. It fails to recognise that mental illness and drug and alcohol problems nearly always coexist, they're a health problem and not a lifestyle choice."

- **Patrick McGorry, Mental Health Expert**

"International experience shows when you push people to the brink, like removing their welfare payments, things just get worse.

There will be more crime, more family violence, more distress within society. We can expect at Centrelink offices there will be aggression and violence as people react to this. Had [the government] spoken to the various bodies who

work in this area and know about this work, we would have been able to advise them this is not the right way. Pushing people to the brink won't make it better.”

- Associate Professor Yvonne Bonomo, director of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne's department of addiction medicine

“The AMA considers these measures to be mean and stigmatising. The AMA considers substance dependence to be a serious health problem, one that is associated with high rates of disability and mortality.

The AMA firmly believes that those affected should be treated in the same way as other patients with serious health conditions, including access to treatment and supports to recovery.”

- The Australian Medical Association (AMA)

"It's not evidence-based, it's not fair, and we stand against it."

"If you discriminate against [welfare recipients], if you impair their return to full functioning by labelling them as a drug user, then you impair their ability to get their life back on track."

"It simply won't work".

- Dr Michael Gannon, Australian Medical Association (AMA)

“The RACP and AChAM are concerned that these measures are not based on evidence of what works - either at a policy or a clinical level.

“In our view they will not only fail to achieve the Bill's stated aim of assisting people struggling with drug and alcohol addiction to access treatment and secure employment, but will harm an already vulnerable group of people and increase their social and financial disadvantage.”

- *The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) and the Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine (AChAM)*

“What it can do is actually make people's social circumstances even more precarious and perhaps tip people into more dangerous ways of living, and even more criminal ways of living if they can't support themselves.”

- Nadine Ezard, St Vincent's Clinical School

“There is no evidence that any of these measures will directly achieve outcomes associated with reductions in alcohol or other drug use or harms, and indeed have the potential to create greater levels of harm, including increased stigma, marginalisation and poverty.”

- National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre

“I strongly urge the Government to reconsider and reverse this retrograde approach to welfare before we see the increase in crime it is likely to create.

“In Australia there is a real lack of funding for drug treatment services – including medically supported drug treatment. The Government would have been better off making stronger investments there rather than attacking the vulnerable.”

- John Ryan, CEO Penington Institute

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**MEDIA CONTACTS: LACHLAN POULTER (MACKLIN) 0423 937 655
DARYL TAN (BURNEY) 0422 028 222**