

From the President's Office
Dr Kean-Seng Lim
GAICD FRACGP MBBS



31 January 2019

Professor Dan Howard SC
Commissioner
Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'
C/- GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

By email: tracey.howe@cso.nsw.gov.au

Re: Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice' limited preliminary consultation under terms of reference

Dear Prof Howard,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice' limited preliminary consultation under terms of reference. AMA (NSW) notes that the Commission is not seeking submissions at this stage and will be calling for more detailed submissions to the Inquiry at a future date. AMA (NSW) would be pleased to provide a formal submission at that time.

AMA (NSW)'s response to this preliminary consultation reflects our organisation's view that addiction is primarily a health issue, requiring treatment and support.

Furthermore, AMA (NSW) supports a balanced approach to methamphetamine. As outlined in the AMA submission to Joint Parliamentary Committee on Law Enforcement Inquiry into Crystal Methamphetamine, law and order responses to the supply and demand of crystal methamphetamine must be offset by efforts to reduce demand for the drug, and for the provision of appropriate health care including referral to treatment and support for users.

With regard to the Draft Proposals for the Conduct of the Inquiry, AMA (NSW) notes that the expert advisory panel will consist of members including:

- (i) At least one member with expertise in health, drug addiction, treatment and rehabilitation.

AMA (NSW) agrees with this inclusion and further stresses the importance of including a health professional with special expertise in methamphetamine addiction, treatment and rehabilitation – rather than drug rehabilitation more generally.

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As a stimulant drug, methamphetamine alters brain functions such as memory, regulation and executive functionⁱ, which has implications for treatment. As a result, methamphetamine addiction requires a tailored response.

As noted in the AMA Position Statement “Methamphetamine – 2015” treatment for methamphetamine addiction is not very well suited to current treatment facilities available in emergency departments, general practices, or acute hospital admissions.

Rehabilitation takes part in two stages. Recovering must first involve a physical detox, which takes almost twice as long as other drugs (10-14 days). Treatment after the detox may need to be continued for many months and full recovery of cognitive functions can take 12-18 months.

The lag time between problem use and treatment also presents difficulties. Users present to general practitioners and other clinicians typically quite late in the course of their illness, which increases complications and difficulties with follow up and compliance.

Currently, there are no therapeutic agents to support methamphetamine abstinence, and there are high rates of relapse.

The second item AMA (NSW) would like to note for the scope of this enquiry is with regard to the terms of reference, including:

- A. The nature, prevalence and impact of crystal methamphetamine (‘ice’) in NSW.
- B. The adequacy of existing measures to target ice in NSW.
- C. Options to strengthen NSW’s response to ice, including law enforcement, education, treatment and rehabilitation responses.

As identified by the NSW Ministry of Health in the December 2017 surveillance report “Methamphetamine Use and Related Harms in NSW,”ⁱⁱ the use of methamphetamine appears to disproportionately affect some regional areas in NSW.

Response and treatment require approaches that take into consideration the unique aspects and challenges of delivering healthcare to residents in these areas. Solutions developed for metro areas of NSW may not be as effective in rural, regional and remote NSW areas, and therefore bespoke measures should be considered in this inquiry.

In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients are known to be more vulnerable to the impacts of crystal methamphetamine. As outlined in the AMA’s submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Law Enforcement Inquiry into Crystal Methamphetamine, the AMA is supportive of commitments and funding that have been made to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drug and alcohol workforce, as well as undertakings to work closely with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to improve care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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AMA (NSW) recommends greater emphasis on the importance of these measures also be made in this Inquiry.

Lastly, while the terms of reference do not specifically address pill testing, given the number of tragic deaths at music festivals in NSW, AMA (NSW) would like to reiterate its support for consideration of a pill testing trial as part of a wider harm minimisation strategy at festivals.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Kean-Seng Lim,
AMA (NSW) President

ⁱ <http://nceta.flinders.edu.au/>

ⁱⁱ "Methamphetamine Use and Related Harms in NSW" Surveillance Report to December 2017. NSW Ministry of Health. March 2018. www.health.nsw.gov.au