



Alcohol  
and Drug  
Foundation



Queensland  
Law Society®



20 December 2024

Mr. David Crisafulli MP  
Premier of Queensland  
1 William Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

Via email [REDACTED]

Dear Premier,

As some of Queensland's leading health, legal and community organisations we urge you to keep the expanded police drug diversion program in place while it is evaluated.

The expansion of the program is widely supported by health and medical experts, legal groups and the Queensland Police Service. This diversion scheme prioritises the health and wellbeing of individuals and the community. Your party has recognised the importance of having clinicians taking leadership in matters related to health, and we want to reassure you that doctors, lawyers, drug workers and police all support the expanded diversion scheme.

The expanded scheme has been available since May and has already diverted over 7,000 people away from the criminal justice system and towards positive rehabilitative pathways.

As the evidence shows, the benefits of this approach include reducing the person's chance of becoming entrenched in the justice system as well as a range of other socio-economic benefits including the opportunity to desist from offending without further action and safer communities.

It is widely recognised that the use of drug diversion is more cost effective, pragmatic and consistent with a harm minimisation approach. Diversion is also favoured for its ability to reduce workloads and pressures on both police and courts, and importantly, it enables young people to avoid a criminal sanction that can have lasting deleterious consequences

The continuation of the program is also critical as the data that is being collected is the type of data that we have long waited for. Building the evidence-base on drug diversion and drug diversion systems is vital for increasing diversion, informing its expansion into rural and remote communities and designing new models of diversionary delivery.

A [recent report](#) looked at the real-life experiences of people who have taken part in the expanded diversion program. Early results show the program has been effective in offering better alternatives for those caught with small amounts of illegal substances. Participants were positive about the program's

care-focused approach, pointing out how important it is to have services that help with the challenges of stigma and limited access to healthcare.

The evidence is clear that a health-based response to drug possession for personal use is effective and does not result in an increase in drug use or crime.

Portugal moved from a criminal response to a health-based response in 2001 and there has been no increase in drug use, including among young people. The change in approach was accompanied by significant health system investment, leading to significantly more people accessing treatment and support, as well as a reduction in drug overdose deaths and blood-borne virus infections.

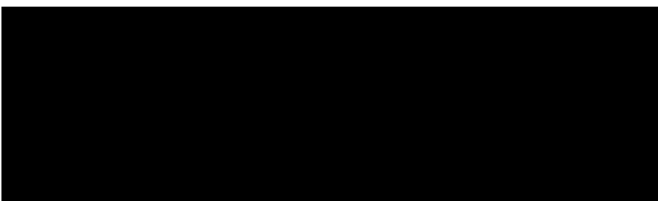
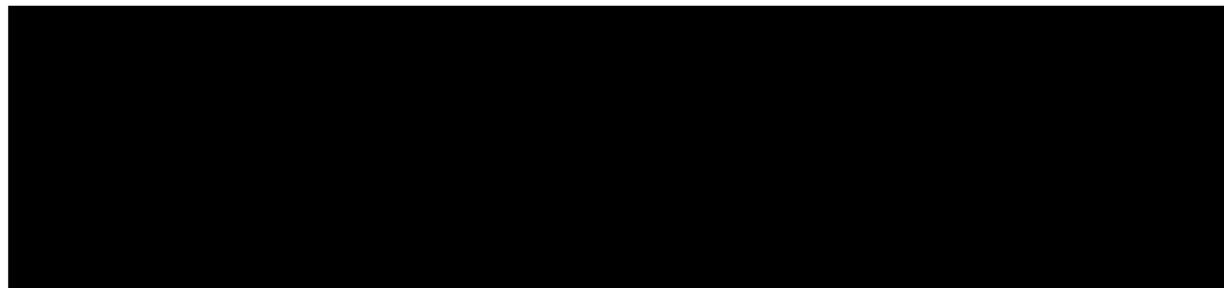
A health response also reduces loads on prisons as well as on police, with no increase in crime rates. In Portugal, the proportion of prisoners sentenced for drug-related offences fell from over 40% to less than the European average of 18%. This outcome is particularly relevant to Queensland, which has some of the highest numbers of prisoners sentenced for drug offences, many of which relate to possession offences.

Just over a year ago the ACT adopted a health-based response to personal drug use. Despite initially opposing the change, ACT Police now say they have not seen any significant changes in behaviour. Police fears of an increase in drug use and crime have not materialised.

It is critical that the State Government put the health and safety of Queenslanders first by maintaining laws that are proven to reduce drug harm and help make communities safer.

We would like to meet you to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely



Dr Erin Lalor AM - Chief Executive Officer [Alcohol and Drug Foundation](#)

Dr Nick Yim – President [Australian Medical Association Queensland](#)

Emma Kill – Chief Executive Officer [QulVAA](#)

Rebecca Fogerty – President [Queensland Law Society](#)

Rebecca Lang - Chief Executive Officer [Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies](#)

Sarah Beaman – Secretary [Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union](#)