

Australian Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018: Alcohol & Other Drugs – Impact and Influence?

The recently released [Report](#) by the Australian Government on our progress with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): *'Report on the implementation of the sustainable development goals 2018'* acknowledged some of the movement toward agreed upon (but voluntarily pursued targets) and waxed cautious about shortfalls and opportunities for clear improvement.

Whilst it is vital to note that alcohol and other drug use and misuse do negatively impact 13 out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, it was in SDG three of the report in which glaring omissions were evident.

List of Sustainable Development Goals that are negatively impacted by alcohol and other drug use.

1. To end poverty in all its forms everywhere!
2. End hunger achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
5. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
6. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Sustainable Development Goal number three is where the alcohol and other drug issue is specifically referred to: *ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING AT ALL AGES.*

In this section of the report, Australia's successful *war on Tobacco* (a relentless and global leading stratagem) received an appropriate and proud mention, but by contrast references to alcohol and specifically our disastrous, 'permission enabled' illicit drug use issue – and its 'wrecking ball' effect on the welfare system, productivity and most disturbingly of all, our health system and its staff – "*Patients under the influence of alcohol or drugs, including ice, and those with mental health issues are the [most likely to become violent](#).*" – were nowhere to be seen.¹

Alcohol.

This is the other 'legal' drug that does cause the most significant harm to our communities, precisely because it is legal! According to World Health Organization (WHO) *Global status [Report on alcohol and health 2014](#)* alcohol is a contributor to more than 200 health conditions and causes around 3.3 million deaths across the globe each year.²

When it comes to alcohol consumption in our nation, the data collected by Australian Bureau of Statistics puts our national consumption of pure alcohol per capita as 9.7 litres³. However, according to World Health Organisation data shared by The Telegraph in late 2016, we were at 12.2 litres per person annual consumption⁴. Either way, Australia is still in the top 20 countries in the world for alcohol consumption. However, improvements are being made to the long standing 'celebratory culture' around alcohol use and misuse. Public campaigns, advertising bans and other drinking-culture challenging work is in play, (at least in the last 10 years) all the commencement of what has been little more than a 'skirmish against' alcohol. However, a full blown 'war' on alcohol as it was with tobacco, is unlikely due not only to its amenity, but also the economic contribution it makes to the economy. Even though, according to some estimates, alcohol has caused up to \$36 billion dollars in harm⁵ to our communities annually, it's contribution to the economy still outweighs its harms, so that the 'economic' equation drives the 'net community benefit' model, regardless of the harms!

But what about the use of illicit substances? To point to the 'elephant in the room' it must be stated again that in 2014 Australia ranked number one in the world for illicit drug use⁶ per capita (and little has changed). Of course, references to these concerning and alarming statistics in relation to illicit drug use, were absent from the self-reporting document. But why are they? If we are proud of our health and community benefiting, and sustainable development goal reaching success on tobacco, why aren't we *chewing at the bit* to do the same with the other drugs, especially the incredibly harmful illicit drugs?

National Drug Strategy – Focus and Priority?

All three of these drugs are subject to our National Drug Strategy and it's three main pillars. The priority of which is firstly Demand Reduction, then Supply Reduction considered as the second most important, and with the important but now utterly dominating third pillar of Harm Reduction. It is clear in the drug issue and sustainable development goals, that leadership is the key. After decades of lobbying by academics, scientists and clinicians, once free from the propagandized persuasion and perfidious promotion of the Tobacco industry,

governments realized that revenues from this drug were not covering the harms it sustained, and consequently went to war against it!

The alcohol industry still has sway in 'leading' the way the national drug strategy is employed with this legal drug, there are more and more 'alcohol challenging' groups and activities emerging in recent years. Yes, the long-standing groups like the Dalgarno Institute have always 'waved the flag' (with little or no funding) but a number of new alliances have emerged to combat the impact of alcohol on community in the last 12 years in particular. Whilst these 'new kids on the block' have added momentum to our alcohol curtailing cause, and certainly whilst we are seeing demand diminishing, alcohol is not only a staple for social lubrication purposes, it is the preferred 'anti-depressant' of an ailing and self-medicating first world culture!

However, who and/or what is leading the policy on illicit drug use in this National Drug Strategy – it appears for certain that it is not anyone remotely interested in Sustainable Development Goals, or anyone interested in the reduction in the drug use – drug use that is actively undermining the potential achievement of 14 of those goals.

Leadership in Drug Policy – Who is in charge?

So, where is the leadership on this? The vast majority of the leadership focus has been placed, not on reducing drug use or uptake, but only on assisting existing drug users; and a growing number of new initiates which this 'permissive messaging' is fostering; to continue to use and increase their 'safer use' of illicit drugs. Predictably there is a continual increase in the incidence of drug abuse, that in turn inflicts harm on individual, families and communities.

This leadership (or lack of) in this illicit drug use space is having little influence in the areas of primary prevention, drug use exiting recovery or serious supply reduction judicial actions (such as enforcement, diversion and the legal incentives to change); the focus instead is on mantras of inevitability, permission and even 'rights' to use these saboteurs of sustainable development goals, called 'drugs'!

The cognitive dissonance in this arena is breath-taking. Upon investigation it continues to appear that a single, well-funded, information and revenue controlling policy group hold sway of both National Drug Strategy Policy interpretation and implementation, regardless of the specifications and priorities. This misuse of *just one pillar* of a very sound three pillar national drug strategy is seeing the other two pillars of Demand and Supply Reduction, utterly undermined. Unsurprisingly, this subterfuge is key to creating a self-fulfilling propaganda prophecy of drug use proliferation (perceived or real), all attempting to foster 'normality' of recreational drug use and thus one that leads to an inevitable cry for legalisation and regulation – all to be funded by the ever-increasing financial black hole that is a financially stretched 'health care' system.

The irony in all this is that the Sustainable Development Goals are also a casualty of such beautifully masked pro-drug agendas.

It's time our governments, policy makers, educators, medical practitioners, judiciary, policing, academics and scientific community did what was done with tobacco. That is, call these substances out for what they truly are – life, health, family and community destroying toxins - and work collaboratively and as tirelessly in the one direction to see our communities educated and legislated away from these poisons. **One Focus – One Message – One Voice: QUIT drug use! Prevent don't Promote!**

It is also time the manipulative dissenting voices of those claiming rights without responsibilities were called to account, as was the tobacco lobby.

It is time those who promote the 'right' to use psychotropic toxins, those who are the close cousins of the drug pushers – the permitters and promoters – were given the complete health and welfare 'bill' for all the harms, direct and indirect; confronted by all the grief these substances cause, and be compelled to pay for this damage out of their own pocket. Time for these peddlers to pay instead of using both tax payer and the hard-working businesses of our nation to foot the bill for careless and sustainability damaging conduct!

It's time to PREVENT not Promote!

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Footnotes:

1. <https://theconversation.com/violence-against-nurses-is-on-the-rise-but-protections-remain-weak-76019>
2. http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msb_gsr_2014_1.pdf?ua=1
3. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/productsbyCatalogue/48BD96605A358A0ACA256F16007D736D?OpenDocument>
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/maps-and-graphics/Countries-according-to-alcohol-consumption/>
5. <http://wardrugs nirvana.blogspot.com/2010/08/alcohol-abuse-costs-australia-36bn-year.html>
6. <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/australia-comes-top-of-global-list-for-recreational-drug-use-in-united-nations-2014-world-drug-report/news-story/764732bd5eb5037096389fcd555bfbcab>