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# Media Release



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## ISSUE: AFL Drug Policy – Attitude and Action Matter?

[*“Permissibility, availability and accessibility - all increase consumption.”* Dalgarno Institute.]

*“Removing a ridiculous self-reporting loophole, is one very small step in the right direction, but a serious attitude change is needed if effective action is going to be taken to protect not only the integrity of the sport, but more importantly the players”,* said the Executive Director of the Dalgarno Institute, Shane Varcoe

The non-disclosure clause to clubs by players or the AFL remains a serious impediment to player and game protection.

Rather than ‘protect player privacy’, it only delays proactive opportunities to engage the player in an intervention or prompt remediation. The data is clear, the longer the use/engagement with substances the greater the risk of habituation or addiction. Consequently, it is not only a ‘career’ at risk, but a person’s health and often life.

By all anecdotal and much emerging empirical evidence that has been, alcohol is a key factor in ‘next level’ drug taking. The ‘warming up’ with our most accessible legal drug, alcohol in many circumstances often insistently ‘invites’ the hapless candidate to substance escalation far more easily than the direct and ‘un-primed’ offer of illicit substances. Do we need the obvious to be stated? Apparently!

*“What is not widely publicised, but what we focus on in our **NO Brainer** school and parent education is that Alcohol is the ‘gateway drug’, not cannabis”,* said Mr Varcoe. Results from the Guttman scale<sup>1</sup> indicated that to 12th graders (and below) alcohol represented the “gateway” drug, leading to the use of tobacco, marijuana, and other illicit substances. Moreover, students who used alcohol exhibited a significantly greater likelihood of using both licit and illicit drugs. The following disclosure from Australian Drug Court Judge, Roger Dive, underscores this... *“I’ve never met a heroin addict yet who didn’t start with alcohol and then cannabis!”*

Now as we know the Aussie ‘culture’ has sadly been celebrating the initiation into alcohol at lower and lower ages with ages of 15 being touted for boys’ initiation, and despite growing efforts to curtail this, it is often exemplified in the ‘footy’ culture.

Mr Varcoe said, *“It’s a concern that much drug education, which does work very well in the right context, is constantly being undermined by an attitude of ‘permissiveness’ or ‘loophole’ policies that send a message that certain people are ‘above it’. All these contradictory messages, whether spoken or inferred only fosters the undermining of good education i.e. ‘don’t’ do drugs until you’re 18 and then go for it, just be careful and don’t die!”*

The Dalgarno Institute recommends:

- Both legislation and education as key foundations of culture shift. Demand and Supply Reduction policies are imperative.
- Introduction of processes for quick detection and referral of player for intervention and remediation.
- The removal from sporting and high profile public arenas, of ‘permissive’ or ‘entitlement’ messages both overt and tacit, which seek to ‘normalise’ some drug use as ‘ok’. (a key strategy of the pro-drug lobby)
- Better player support mechanisms to develop life/coping skills not just ‘player performance’.

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<sup>1</sup> (Tristan Kirby MPH1, Adam E. Barry PhD2,\* Article first published online: 19 JUN 2012 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2012.00712.x/abstract>)

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