

**Drug Detection & Screening in Schools
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Please find included with this letter the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation-SA Branch Inc- ACHPER (SA), submission to the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) Drug Detection and Screening in Schools review. This has been developed by a range of Health Professional and Educators on behalf of our Professional Education Association.

For any discussion of these issues, please contact me on 8232 7055.

I would like to wish NCETA the best for this critical review of these issues and ACHPER (SA) look forward to continuing to promote quality programs to support the Health and Well-being of our community.

Kind Regards,



Matt Schmidt
Executive Director
ACHPER (SA)

Drug Detection and Screening in Schools

Submission Coversheet

Type of submission (<i>tick one</i>): <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Association- ACHPER (SA)	
Title (Dr/Prof/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss): Name : Mr Matt Schmidt	
Name of organisation (<i>if applicable</i>): ACHPER (SA)- The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation- SA Branch Inc-	
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Is all or part of your individual or organisational submission to be kept confidential? <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Which stakeholder group do you belong to or are writing on behalf of? <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Association representing Health Professionals, Health & PE educators and teachers.	

Drug Detection and Screening in Schools

Submission Pro-forma

Theme 1: Drug Detection and Screening – Viability, Effectiveness, Impact and Implications (Social, Economical, Psychological, Ethical, Legal Perspectives)

1. Are you in favour / not in favour of drug detection and screening in schools?

ACHPER (SA) is not in favour of drug detection and screening in schools. ACHPER agrees that schools should continue to use appropriate strategies to identify and support students who may be at risk due to their current or potential substance use. Schools can support students and parents by providing information on services that have staff with the experience, skills and resources needed to assess a student's drug use and any counselling/ treatment or referral to a more specialised service.

As schools (primary-secondary) play an important role between the community and the law, it is crucial that schools have appropriate policies in place to respond to drug related issues. This includes a comprehensive health education program with training for teachers to implement these programs and to be aware of the indicators for potential or actual drug use and appropriate strategies to respond to this use.

ACHPER believes we need to expand programs related to children's welfare, care, social skills to support the health and wellbeing of all students. Research shows that social support networks that we have in schools have proven to work, (Luke A, 2000, Queensland School reform longitudinal study, Queensland Government).

2. What do you believe would be the advantages of implementing drug detection and screening measures in schools?

Public perception might suggest that drug screening could act as a deterrent through the following: possible reduction of on site drug use; reduce onsite peddling/supply of drugs; reduce distractions for students; harassment and bullying (stand over tactics); reduced reasons for trespassers coming onto school sites and reduced reasons for drug suppliers to hang around school boundaries. All of the above are unsubstantiated views and opinions and unsupported by research evidence as stated in the YES (Youth, Education and Strategy) Education Occasional Papers, Paper 2, Drug Testing in Schools (Yamaguchi, Johnston & O'Malley 2003). This research showed there was no difference between random or 'for caused' in deterring drug use (marijuana or other drug use). The results presented in this paper showed that the results from their earlier research were replicated with this enhanced sample. There was still no significant differences in marijuana use or the use of other illicit drugs as a function of whether or not the school had (a) drug testing of any kind, (b) drug testing of students based on cause or suspicion, or (c) drug testing of athletes. Nor was there evidence that the heavy drug-using segment of the student population, specifically, is deterred from using marijuana or other illicit drugs by random or for-cause testing. The research showed that even if they took the observed values to be true, they would suggest only 5% to 7% reduction in the prevalence of marijuana use associated with testing and, disturbingly, a larger proportional increase in the use of other drugs, and controlling for the kinds of students and schools involved. The researchers suggested a possible hypothesis to explain this phenomenon, "*such testing leads students to reduce their use of drugs that can be detected (like marijuana) and to displace their use onto drugs that they think less likely to be detected.*" While they considered that this was not an unreasonable hypothesis, they believed that enough data exist to provide an adequate test of it.

3. What would be the disadvantages (including potential unintended harmful consequences) of implementing drug detection and screening measures in schools?

Disadvantages of implementing drug detection and screening measures in schools include: Whole process of screening and detection is a distraction to schools and their role in the education of their students. May reduce student attendances even further, particularly those students may be at risk due to their substance use Suspicions may be unfounded and student reputations may be tarnished. If only some schools are selected for testing of students they may be seen as drug schools and this may have an impact on enrolments. While testing should be confidential any possible leaks of information will disadvantage schools and students.

Teachers in schools make a contribution towards the development of social capital, and screening will break down these processes and what the school is trying to provide.

Drug testing and screening does not address the fundamental issue of why people use drugs (risks of problematic issues). It has the potential to reduce student connectedness and positive community attitudes to local schools. Schools and parents may use these results of the drug test punitively. This could include suspensions and expulsions of students and has the potential that the students could increase their drug use. Drug testing and screening gives students excuses for not using but it doesn't give them reasons for not using i.e. is giving them the knowledge and skills needed to feel in control and to make decisions about drug use beyond their school life. If drug testing is used there is a risk that students will use more harmful drugs that are unscreened or use substances to mask the drugs (Yamaguchi, Johnston & O'Malley 2003; Cabonell, J. 2005; Brown, J. 2002.) If at any time student/teacher relationships are difficult to develop and maintain, this will make it even harder for teachers to form positive relationships with students.

Detecting drug supply is more important and this screening will not address this. Expense factor of the testing and screening that could be directed towards prevention, education, awareness raising programs that will support students at risk.

4. How viable, effective and appropriate are the following types of drug testing or screening for schools?

Confidentiality is a major issue, and also who will undertake this work are major issues. Any form of screening whether it is pencil and paper, oral or drug testing takes time, adequate resources and facilities and trained assessors/testers. It is important to consider the issue of parental consent or refusal. Refusal is likely when there is parental substance use.

I. Questionnaires (pen and pencil / online screening forms)

Naïve in the extreme to consider factual information will be provided, particularly if they involve self completion. Maybe useful but results would be questionable. .

II. Interviews and clinical observations (e.g. those used in a clinical interview assessment)

Clinical observations could be appropriate if undertaken by a suitably qualified person within the school, eg school health nurse/counsellor. However confidentiality is enhanced if this is conducted off site. Useful for voluntary or referred drug users. Motivational interviewing has been effective with some students who have sought to address problems, eg Smoking- support from school counsellors.

III. Independent tests of body fluids (e.g. saliva, sweat, urine, breath or blood)

Concerns about who is undertaking tests and where the money to support this process will come from. Process is time consuming and inconvenient. Blood testing is the best indicator but obtrusive and expensive as this requires laboratory identification. Some drug tests can be carried out on-site and others are required to be conducted in a laboratory and each method has advantages. These were outlined extensively by Dr. Ken Pidd (2002). The window of detection depended on the substance and the particular test used, for example blood testing the window of detection is very narrow. Urine was considered the least expensive but was extremely intrusive; this could be a particular issue for adolescent females. For all tests there is a risk of false negatives and positives. Data recently provided by Dr Kyle Dyer highlighted that false positives are commonly linked to saliva tests. False positives are likely to occur between 10-21% in samples in relation to methamphetamine and up to 45% in samples for cannabis. Medications and some foods e.g. poppy seeds on bagels can result in positive tests (NHS Regional Laboratory for Toxicology 2005), A false negative can result in false reassurance for the school and parents

5. Which type(s) of drug testing or screening do you believe should be implemented in schools? Please provide reasons for your response.

We do not believe that students should be drug tested as a specific section of the community. Why target students? What evidence is there that illegal drug use by students is out of proportion to the rest of the community and impacting on their health.

6. In your opinion, should drug testing be randomly conducted or targeted at selected groups? Please provide reasons for your response.

Random or selected drug testing will not catch the clever user. Students who are using and are problematic users are generally known to school leadership because of academic results, behaviour,

informants, family history and anecdotal evidence. Most schools have policies that set out the guidelines for managing and responding to identified substance use.

7. If drug usage is detected, what do you think the next steps should be to address the problem?

It needs to be dealt within the existing schools drug policy that is supported by the Drug Strategy guidelines and Intervention Matters (South Australian Schools). The policies in the majority of South Australian schools are developed in consultation with members of the school community (parents, students, staff) and community agencies. It is important to have the resources available to support students and parents.

Theme 2: Other Alternatives – Viability, Effectiveness, Impact and Implications (Social, Economical, Psychological, Ethical, Legal Perspectives)

8. What alternatives to drug detection and screening programs do you believe would address drug use among school students?

Reinforcing and strengthening schools' health and wellbeing programs should be the major target to address drug use among school students. This includes drug and alcohol education which should be an essential part of a comprehensive Health Education program at every year level. This can be supported with peer support training, developing resilience, and having policies and strategies to respond to issues such as bullying. An example would be the DECS Learner Wellbeing Project and drug strategy documents

9. What would be the advantages of implementing these alternatives?

More likely to engender long term behaviour changes.

Non evasive methods. Cheaper than employing drug testers and screeners. Reinforce the investment already made in a long and complex issue. Making schools safe and supportive environments for young people and to enhance their development

10. What would be the disadvantages of implementing these alternatives?

Students who do not attend school will miss out on these quality health education programs. Students will not learn the knowledge and skills that can be utilised throughout the life not just within school.

11. How viable, effective and appropriate are these alternatives?

Needs to be a holistic approach based around sound evidence. Schools are competing against a range of issues, media, choice, pressure. Schools are just one approach and need support to develop quality programs. The proposed need for quality health education programs are very viable and appropriate. The DASSA (Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia) research bulletin, number 4, December 2006 reported that since 2002 the proportion of students reporting use of licit and illicit drugs has either decreased significantly or not changed. This includes both recent use and use within a student's lifetime. The core business of schools is to provide education in a safe and supportive environment, not to try and solve societies problems in isolation. Schools are constantly being asked to take on the role of family and society without the resources to do so and some may consider the right to do so.

Additional Comments

12. Are there any other issues on drug detection and screening in schools that you would like to address?

In conclusion, ACHPER is well placed in the professional and wider community, and welcomes the opportunity to play a critical ongoing role in:

- the coordination of activities - advocacy, policy formation, research, professional development, projects, resource development, information dissemination and partnerships.
- the development of national and state, collaborative, cross sectional approaches to quality Health Education including Drug Education programs.

For further information please contact ACHPER (SA) Executive Director Matt Schmidt, ACHPER (SA) on 8232 7055 or m.schmidt@achpersa.com.au

References

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