

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Minister Little, Minister Faafoi

Tēnā koutou

Kākahungia te tangata ki te aroha, kua ki te whakawhiu - Our people need a cloak of support and care, not punishment and stigma.

At pivotal moments, New Zealanders from all backgrounds and cultures have come together to reform unfair laws and build the health of our communities. As a society we strive for fairness and equality, because we recognise that what affects one part of our community affects all of us. When we support compassionate and commonsense policies, our whole country benefits.

At this pivotal moment, we are calling on you to adopt a compassionate and evidence-based approach to drug law by **repealing and replacing the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 to ensure drug use is treated as a health and social issue**. Doing so would put into effect recommendations from the [Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry](#), the [Safe and Effective Justice Advisory Group](#), the conclusions of the [Law Commission's](#) 2011 legislative review, and the [National Drug Policy](#). It is also the most effective way to support the wellbeing of all our communities.

The recent referendum on the Cannabis Legalisation and Control Bill brought to a head a long overdue public conversation about drugs and shone a light on the stigma and shame that has held back progress on this issue. What the extremely close result between 'yes' and 'no' voters obscures is the consensus among the vast majority of those who participated in the cannabis debate; that the status quo is causing harm and we need to improve our current approach to drug law. **There is no consensus in favour of inaction.**

Since the referendum results, more people than ever are now in favour of [a new approach to drug law](#), as indicated in a poll conducted earlier this year. While the referendum is over, the problems of prohibition have not gone away. Our laws prevent people accessing help when they need it, and they leave thousands every year with a conviction that impacts on livelihoods, mental health, relationships, travel, housing and education.

Prohibition continues to discriminate against Māori and Pasifika, who account for [more than half of all cannabis convictions in Aotearoa](#). Convictions also fall disproportionately on young people. 2019 amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Act have failed to shift these unequal outcomes in criminalisation for low-level drug offences.

We urge you to adopt [international best practice](#), which increasingly favours removing all criminal penalties for low-level drug offences. In particular, we urge you to embrace the bold, compassionate leadership you demonstrated in 2018 at the United Nations, when you rejected then-US President Donald Trump's attempts to renew the war against drugs, rightly [favouring a 'health approach'](#) instead.

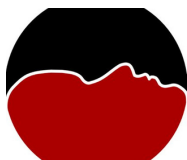
Taking a health- and social-based approach to drug use would reduce stigma, meaning that community leaders, educators, health providers and whānau could focus more on prevention and harm reduction, while providing timely and judgement-free treatment or support. It would

also mean that medicinal cannabis patients could access affordable relief without fear of prosecution.

While we applaud recent law changes to allow drug checking at festivals and elsewhere, we note that isolated amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Act will not provide the coherent, just and effective legislative framework that is so urgently needed. We call on you to overhaul the Misuse of Drugs Act and put in its place a system that puts health and social justice first. The new law should ensure that people are no longer prosecuted for low-level drug offences and are instead offered a pathway into treatment if they need it.

We call on you to take this decision in our collective best interest, based on good evidence and a shared vision for a fairer and more equitable society.

Let's keep moving on drug law, and take this step forward for the wellbeing of all of our communities.



List of organisations

- ActionStation
- Amnesty New Zealand
- Auckland City Mission
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Dapaanz
- Drugs, Health and Development Project
- Hāpai te Hauora
- Helen Clark Foundation
- JustSpeak
- Make It Legal
- Mental Health Foundation
- Māori Law Society
- National Hauora Coalition
- New Zealand Medical Association
- New Zealand University Students Association
- NZ Drug Foundation
- People Against Prisons Aotearoa
- Public Health Association
- Te Hauora o Turanganui a Kiwa
- Te Rau Ora
- Wellington City Mission
- Wesley Community Action
- YES 2020

List of individuals

- Chester Borrowes, QSO, previous MP for the National Party
- Joe Boden, Professor and Director, Christchurch Health and Development Study, University of Otago Christchurch
- Dr Fiona Hutton, Associate Professor, Institute of Criminology, Victoria University Wellington
- Richard Medlicott, Fellowship of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners
- Doug Sellman, Professor, Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago Christchurch