

30 November 2018

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

E te rangatira, tēnā koe

Urgent action required on drugs

New Zealand urgently needs to change the way it deals with drug issues. The problems we are faced with today are not going to be solved by doing the same old things.

Like you, we think New Zealand's drug problem should be treated as a health issue. But with 80 percent of government spending on drugs going to law enforcement, courts and prisons, we're not even close to taking a balanced approach.

Due to chronic underfunding, our health services struggle to help even those at the most acute end of the spectrum. Many miss out on getting help, or have to wait months for treatment. Funding for interventions for those with less serious addiction issues is even more dire. A range of responses to alcohol and other drug harm are required to meet the needs of New Zealanders, including early intervention, prevention, harm reduction, and low-threshold treatment options such as peer support. All of these are underfunded, without exception.

We are keen to help you set things right. We therefore ask that you:

1. Respond quickly and comprehensively to the findings of the Mental Health and Addictions Inquiry. Tinkering around the edges of the system will not provide long-lasting solutions.
2. Commit to doubling investment in alcohol and other drug-related prevention, harm reduction and treatment. We urge you to budget for new investment of at least \$150 million per year from 2019.
3. Review our outdated drug law to ensure that people using synthetic cannabinoids and other drugs get a referral to health and other services, rather than a criminal conviction. Penalising people for drug use is a huge barrier to accessing services that could help them.

Doubling the treatment budget is not only the right thing to do – it makes economic sense. An independent report released by the Drug Foundation earlier this month found that a \$150 million investment in prevention, harm reduction and treatment could return a social benefit for New Zealand of at least \$225 million, and probably significantly more.

New Zealand can't afford to sit back and hope that drugs issues will fix themselves. We are in the grip of a synthetic cannabinoid crisis that has been linked to at least 50 deaths, and communities continue to struggle from the effects of harmful alcohol and methamphetamine use.

While solutions are readily available to us, it is going to take leadership from you and others in your government to make sure we give every New Zealander a fair shot at life.

Nā mātou noa, nā

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Hon Simon Bridges, Leader of the Opposition
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