



# National Committee for Addiction Treatment

POSITION STATEMENT  
MARCH 2009

## TREATING CRIMINAL OFFENDERS SAVES TAXPAYERS MONEY

Treatment is the most cost-effective way to break the cycle of addiction, crime, and social harm resulting from alcohol and drug abuse and problem gambling.<sup>1</sup>

However, only about 14% of people with drug and alcohol addictions and an estimated 10%<sup>2</sup> of problem gamblers currently access treatment.

Co-ordinated and timely services need to be implemented throughout the criminal justice system. Increasing capacity to do this is one of the key challenges for the addiction treatment sector.

## ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND CRIME CAN GO HAND-IN-HAND

- Approximately 200,000 New Zealanders are arrested each year. About half are under the influence of alcohol and other drugs at the time of arrest.<sup>3</sup>
- 89% of serious offenders are alcohol and drug affected in the period leading up to their offence.<sup>4</sup>
- 58% of crimes are committed by people under the influence of alcohol and drugs at the time of the offence.<sup>3</sup>
- Only 6% of all convictions are for drug offences but many acquisitive offences (such as fraud and theft) are committed to finance alcohol and drug use or gambling.



## MOST NZ PRISONERS HAVE PROBLEMS WITH ALCOHOL, DRUGS, OR GAMBLING

- 89.4% of prisoners have at some time in their life had a substance abuse disorder (compared with 13% of the general population).<sup>5</sup>
- 50% of prisoners have a diagnosable Axis 1 mental health disorder. Of these, 90% also have a substance abuse disorder.<sup>4</sup>
- One third of inmates meet the criteria for problem or pathological gambling.<sup>6</sup>

## YOUTH OFFENDING AND EARLY INTERVENTION

- Alcohol is the most commonly used drug by youth, then cannabis.
- 80% of youth offenders commit only one offence.
- A small group of 'high-risk, life course persistent offenders' are responsible for a disproportionate number of offences committed by young people.<sup>7</sup>

*"By engaging young people and their families we can break the cycle of reoffending and keep them out of the criminal justice system."*

Christine Kalin, CEO, Odyssey House Auckland.



## MOST ILLICIT DRUG USERS ARE YOUNG, WHITE, AND MALE

- Two thirds of people who frequently use illicit drugs are male with a median age of 28.
- 80% of the frequent drug users are European and 15% Maori.
- Frequent methamphetamine users are the most likely to report financial, legal, and police problems in relation to their drug use.<sup>8</sup>

## GAMBLING ADDICTION IS A GROWING BUT LARGELY HIDDEN PROBLEM

- Gambling is the main reason why people commit fraud in the workplace.<sup>9</sup> More work needs to be done to highlight the realities of gambling, alcohol, and drug issues with employers.
- The Problem Gambling Foundation reports that their referrals have nearly doubled to 240 clients in the last year as a result of improved screening and closer working with the Department of Corrections

## MORE OFFENDERS SHOULD BE DIVERTED INTO OR OFFERED TREATMENT

- Many offenders are intoxicated at the time of arrest but detoxification in police cells is dangerous. NCAT support the NZ Police strategy to place nurses specialising in mental health and addictions into Police watch-houses to provide appropriate management of intoxicated offenders and referral to treatment.

*"There needs to be clear protocols about what happens when referred offenders don't engage. Consistency in approach is essential, giving a clear message to the offender and increasing the confidence of the judiciary when sentencing."*

Robert Steenhuisen, Regional Manager,  
Community Alcohol and Drug Services.

- NZ courts need clinical advice in the courtroom. Placing alcohol and drug clinicians in district courts will ensure judges get the right clinical advice based on specialist assessments to support sentencing decisions.
- Research indicates that coerced treatment is as effective as voluntary treatment therefore more people should be diverted to treatment rather than charged with criminal offences.
- NZ Courts need more flexible sentencing options to include specific drug-treatment programmes as part of sentencing.
- Close liaison between the Probation Service and local alcohol and drug treatment teams improves outcomes for individuals, family/whanau and communities.

*"Identifying the underlying issues and intervening at this point brings about positive results."*

Lynette Hutson, Salvation Army.

## MORE PRISON INMATES SHOULD BE PROVIDED WITH TREATMENT PROGRAMMES

- Treatment in prison, including methadone maintenance, reduces re-offending and reduces harm.
- Care NZ's Drug Treatment Units<sup>10</sup> in prisons are modelled on the therapeutic community approach and involve face-to-face therapy followed up with an aftercare plan.
- Without the programme, around 40 in 100 will re-offend within 24 months, but that figure drops between 13%-16% for those attending the programme.

*"For many prisoners it is their first attempt at treatment and most are grateful for the chance. The programmes are no 'soft option', but they work."*

Tim Harding, CEO, Care NZ.

## MAORI AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS NEED CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES

- Maori and Pacific people have similar rates of substance disorders as other population groups but they are over-represented in prisons and in gangs.
- They also have higher populations in the age groups most represented in offending rates (15 to 29 years of age).
- More services that specifically target Maori and Pacific people are needed within the justice system.
- Treatment providers need to take a holistic approach encompassing tikanga when working with whanau.<sup>11</sup>



## IN CONCLUSION: WHAT IS NEEDED?

NZ must optimise the opportunities for alcohol, drug, and problem gambling interventions including:

- Standard screening in courts nationwide.
- Increased access to diversion and treatment programmes for offenders.
- Added treatment capacity so as not to reduce access to services.
- More drug and alcohol professionals in district courts, police stations, and prisons.
- Targeted programmes for Maori and Pacific Island People, and youth at risk.
- Research and evaluation to find and build on the success factors.

1. NZ Drug Foundation, August 2007
2. Assessment of the Social Impacts of Gambling in New Zealand, SHORE, Massey University 2008
3. NZ Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring programme 2005
4. Department of Corrections
5. National Study of Psychiatric Morbidity in NZ Prisons 1999
6. RJ Williams et al 2005, Gambling and problem gambling with forensic populations. A review of the literature.,Criminal Justice and Behaviour 32 (6)
7. Cabinet Papers, Ministry of Justice, 2007
8. Recent Trends in Illegal Drug Use in New Zealand 2005-2007, SHORE, Massey University, 2008
9. KPMG Fraud Survey 2008
10. Arohata Women's and Waikeria, Christchurch, Rimutaka, Hawkes Bay and Spring Hill
11. Effective Interventions Cabinet Paper, Ministry of Justice, 2007



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