

COMMUNITY DRUG SUMMIT

Statement by Minister for Health

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [2.07 pm]: In less than a week this place will host Western Australia's first Community Drug Summit. One hundred Western Australians will sit in this Chamber, and over the course of five days explore the entire spectrum of the illicit drug problem.

Parents, former and current drug users, young people, indigenous, rural and ethnically diverse communities, religious organisations, local government and business will all be represented. A very deliberate decision was made not to include politicians in the summit. If we are to see a force for change it must come from the community. As a Government we are asking the community for its views on the best way forward on one of the most emotive, divisive and complex social problems facing us today. While there are many different views on the best way to tackle the illicit drug problem, most people generally agree that the current approach is failing. What the summit aims to achieve is a consensus of opinion on the best way forward, a bringing together of the many sides of the debate into a workable framework for change.

When I announced plans for the summit almost four months ago, I called for a bipartisan approach and a willingness to consider all options. Indeed, bipartisan support will be critical if we are to find long-term and practical solutions to the illicit drug problem. I am pleased to say that there is a lot of support in the broader community, and indeed in this place, for a wide-ranging examination of the drug issue. The organisers of the summit have been careful to ensure all sides of the debate are represented.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr Denzil McCotter, director of the Community Drug Summit office and her staff for striking what I believe is a fair balance. There would always be people who were disappointed at not gaining selection. The Drug Summit office received more than 1 000 applications and could choose only 100, but Dr McCotter and her team were scrupulous in ensuring that those 100 people represented the breadth of opinion.

It is not just the delegates who will represent the full spectrum of the drug debate next week. I am pleased to inform the House today that a number of eminent guest speakers will help stimulate debate throughout the summit. Torgny Peterson, director of the Hassela Educational Foundation in Sweden will speak on the first morning of the summit about Sweden's restrictive approach to illicit drugs. Martin Hosek from the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health will outline Switzerland's four-fold approach which focuses on prevention, therapy, harm and repression. National keynote speakers include Dr Ingrid van Beek, Director of the King's Cross Birketon Road Centre, Dr Alex Wodak, Director of Alcohol and Drug Services at Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital, Dr Joe Santamaria, President of the Family Council of Australia, Dr Alison Ritter, head of research at Melbourne's Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Harry Clarke, associate professor from La Trobe University and Jack Johnson, Tasmania's deputy police commissioner.

Among the delegates drawn from the community, many are people who have been personally affected by drugs, either through their child's use, or a sibling's, a friend's, or indeed their own. It is their summit. It is their opportunity to present a series of recommendations to government about what they believe future drugs policy should be.

There is little doubt that the way forward will require courage. As a community, it is vital that we do not simply accept the abuse of drugs and the consequences of that abuse as something we cannot change. It is my sincere hope that the Drug Summit will give us a clear way forward and the courage to find ways to minimise the damage drugs are doing to our community.