

Major issues currently facing drug addiction treatment in New Zealand

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The New Zealand situation

Addiction is a serious problem in New Zealand affecting a broad range of people. Its impact and costs are not only experienced by the individual, but also by family, friends and wider society.

- Around 12 percent of our population will experience a substance use disorder in their lifetime.
- The estimated social cost from illicit drug use is \$1.8 billion.
- In 2014/15 the Government spent just \$152m or so on addiction treatment services. Funding has not significantly increased despite the sector struggling to meet rapidly increasing demands.



Addiction treatment benefits everyone

Treatment works to transform lives and to prevent people from descending into addiction. It also reduces the impacts on family, friends and wider society.

- An estimated \$7 in social costs is saved for every \$1 spent on treatment.
- Increased investment would reduce suffering and save New Zealand money, yet dapaanz believes addiction treatment is still seen as Health's poor cousin.

More effective addiction services would actively contribute to a range of Government strategies including the Better Public Services targets of:

- reducing welfare dependency
- supporting vulnerable children
- boosting employment skills
- reducing crime.

Funding must shift away from punishment and towards a health approach

A person with addiction has a health problem not necessarily a criminal one. While people must be responsible for crimes they commit, treating and preventing addiction would reduce the reason many addicted people become criminals.

- Resources must be increased towards early identification/intervention and treatment.
- Increased availability of services would make it easier for people to get help early before they resort to crime.
- Waiting list times must be eliminated so people receive help when they ask for it. When they have to wait months for treatment they often return to active substance use.
- People should be assessed for addiction as appropriate at social services, doctor's surgeries or wherever they go for help.
- Reducing addiction rates reduces demand for drugs. This in turn reduces supply and criminal drug supply association.

New Zealand could learn from the Netherlands' approach to crime and drug-related offending where the emphasis is on rehabilitation and working with people to address the reason for their offending, including their dependence on drugs.



- In the Netherlands more than 20 prisons have been shut down in the last few years because these penal reforms have drastically reduced prisoner numbers.
- Portugal is experiencing substantial declines in addiction and resulting crime because people are receiving treatment instead of being locked up.

By contrast New Zealand has just set aside \$1 billion for 1800 more prison beds. Our prison numbers are higher than almost every other country and steadily growing, largely because of drug offences

- The 2010-2015 New Zealand Arrestee Drug Use Monitor (NZ Police) indicates that in 2015, 85 percent of detainees in Whangarei, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch had at least one problem resulting from substance use (e.g. criminal charges, car accidents, job losses, overdoses).
- The Monitor also indicates 37 percent of detainees “felt they had a problem” with alcohol or other drugs. However, 29 percent said they did not receive help when they asked for it.

Now is not the time for timidity. Many politicians continue to avoid discussing drug law reform so they don’t appear “soft on crime”. Meanwhile, social attitudes have changed markedly with most people supporting decriminalisation for less harmful drugs.

There must be more incentive to join the workforce and this is achievable

More people need to see benefit in joining a well-funded, competent and effective addiction workforce. Aside from the necessary increase in resources, this would not be difficult to achieve.

- There is a big pool of potential addiction practitioners, such as nurses, counsellors and social workers who, if employed in addiction treatment and under the supervision of an addiction accredited supervisor, would already qualify for provisional registration as addiction practitioners.
- People with an applied bachelor degree in the above sectors would only need to obtain a level 7 addiction-specific qualification to go to full registration.

Addiction practitioners must require registration

Currently any person can set themselves up as an addiction practitioner, even if they have no qualifications at all. That means people experiencing addiction, who are among the most vulnerable New Zealanders, could find themselves unknowingly being counselled by someone who does not have the skills or training to give them support that will really help them.

- There are many addiction practitioners operating in New Zealand without appropriate qualifications and this has had dire consequences for some addicted people and their loved ones.
- Compulsory registration would ensure addiction practitioners must meet certain training standards and would make them accountable in terms of ethics and behaviour.
- dapaanz would be willing to work with the Government on achieving a regulated industry that would protect both addiction practitioners and the families and individuals they serve.

About Dapaanz

Dapaanz is the member association representing the professional interests of people working in the addiction treatment sector and has more than 1600 members. We:

- exist to support our members
- foster and maintain ethical and competent addiction practice
- manage endorsement and registration processes
- promote professional development
- advocate for the workforce and people affected by addictions.

Find out more at www.dapaanz.org.nz.

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