

Media Release

Evidence shows that drug testing pilot won't work

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The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) is urging the Federal Government to abandon plans to drug test welfare recipients, claiming it will be ineffective and will place enormous stress on individuals and their families.

The Government wants to establish a pilot program that will force up to 5000 Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients to participate in a drug testing trial and will subject them to a variety of requirements and restrictions if they test positive.

"Addiction is a complex health issue," RACP President of the Chapter of Addiction Medicine, Dr Adrian Reynolds said.

"The RACP wants to work with the Government to create effective policy solutions for people battling drug and alcohol addiction but drug testing Australians on welfare is not the way to do it.

"Drug testing welfare recipients and removing their support won't connect them with the treatment and rehabilitation services they need. This policy will fail and it will lead to poor health outcomes for this community.

"More needs to be done to help people overcome addiction and improve their job prospects.

"The medical profession is calling for increased investments to address the limited availability of alcohol and other drug services and suitably trained clinicians, across Australia."

RACP President Dr Catherine Yelland said the policy of drug testing welfare recipients has failed in other countries.

"As doctors we value evidence and the evidence in this area shows that drug testing trials don't work," Dr Yelland explained.

"The experience of countries like the USA and New Zealand tells us that drug testing has a poor record in identifying people with drug problems and modifying drug use. Why would a similar pilot program that drug tested Australians produce a different outcome?"

"All indications are that it will further marginalise people who already experience a greater burden of social, physical and financial disadvantage."

In 2013, the New Zealand Government introduced a drug testing program as a pre-employment condition among welfare recipients. Of the 8,001 beneficiaries tested, only 22 returned a positive result for illicit drug use. The program cost \$1 million to fund.

Similar results were produced in drug testing programs in the United States. In Missouri's 2014 testing program, 446 people were tested, with 48 returning positive results. In Utah, 838 people were screened with 29 returning a positive result.

The RACP's submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017 is available [here](#).

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 15,000 physicians and 7,500 trainee physicians across Australia and New Zealand.

The College represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.

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