

## Media Release

### Drug and alcohol measures will not work

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The Federal Government's proposal to tackle illicit drug use through a drug testing trial and changes to welfare activity requirements will have major consequences for people battling drug and alcohol addiction, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) has warned.

Changes being proposed will force around 5000 Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients to undergo drug testing and will subject them to a variety of restrictions if they test positive.

"Drug and alcohol addiction is a serious health problem and there is absolutely no evidence to show drug testing trials will work," RACP President Dr Catherine Yelland said.

"On the contrary, the experience of countries like the United States and New Zealand show that drug testing has a poor record in modifying drug use. Similar initiatives were shown to be ineffective in identifying people with substance dependency and were criticised for discriminating against some of the most vulnerable people in those communities."

In its [submission](#) to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017, the RACP says the design of the Government's proposed drug testing trial is inherently flawed.

"It's simply not feasible that a program of this nature can operate effectively across Australia, due to the lack of accessible pathology and treatment services available," Dr Yelland said.

"The trial's design is skewed and unrepresentative. The Government wants to trial the testing in sites where services are already available so it won't inform any national program nor will it add to a meaningful evidence base of how drug testing works."

Dr Yelland said the RACP had serious concerns about other amendments proposed in the Bill that will remove drug and alcohol dependency as a legitimate reason for jobseekers to not meet participation requirements.

"This measure will see the Government essentially say to people who are facing extremely complex drug and alcohol addiction, 'If you miss a job interview perhaps you are withdrawing or you are having a relapse, we are taking away your support,'" Dr Yelland explained.

"In reality, it is applying a blunt instrument to a very complex problem. It won't help these people and it won't motivate them to seek treatment. What it will do is cause substantial harm to a highly vulnerable population."

Dr Yelland said more must be done to help people in accessing treatment and support.

"Doctors see the enormous damage caused by drug and alcohol addiction," Dr Yelland said.

"We know that the majority of these patients are suffering from other issues, for example, trauma, domestic violence, mental health issues or homelessness. These measures don't address those underlying problems. Taking payments away from these people will only cause even greater hardship and a likely spiral into worse health."

**Ends**

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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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