

Media Release

RACP urges Government to abandon welfare drug testing plans

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The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) has urged the Government to abandon its trial to drug test welfare recipients, labelling the proposal as impractical and ineffective.

If passed by parliament, 5000 Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients will be drug tested from 1 January 2018 and face a variety of financial penalties if they test positive. The proposal was announced as part of the Federal Budget earlier this month.

RACP President Dr Catherine Yelland said the College membership, including those from the Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine, had expressed disappointment and concern with the proposal.

“Research and experience has shown that drug testing has a poor record in modifying drug use. We know that forcing addicts into treatment is an ineffective way of combating illicit drug use,” explained Dr Yelland.

“Addiction is a chronic relapsing and remitting health issue and Governments across Australia must think of it as a chronic healthcare issue moving forward,” said Dr Yelland.

Dr Yelland said the RACP believes the solution to reducing the number of Australians suffering from addiction lies in adequately funding treatment and support services.

“We agree that more people suffering with addiction need to be referred for drug and alcohol treatment. However these plans for drug testing of welfare recipients are likely to be ineffective, expensive and could further negatively impact people’s lives.

“Importantly, any approach to this issue must also include proper investment in treatment and recovery services, otherwise people looking for help will just end up at the back of an already long queue,” she added.

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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.