

**Comment from Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director, Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre:**

**Why is putting these facilities in populated places, like the Melbourne CBD, important?**

It's now 35 years since the first supervised injecting centre opened in Europe and 20 years since the first in the English-speaking world opened – namely ours, in Kings Cross Sydney. There are now over 120 such services around the world, in more than a dozen different countries. There are also more than 250 peer reviewed publications in the medical literature showing the benefits of such services. We now know, incontrovertibly, that they save lives, make a difference to people's lives, take public injecting off the streets, reduce needle litter in the streets, and provide a gateway into treatment and support services. Crucially, they have no negative impact on crime, and they have a positive return on investment. Put simply, they work. One of the most crucial aspects of such a facility is that it be located near the problem it is addressing. Just as we wouldn't put a specialized cancer treatment facility in an area where few people suffered that type of cancer, we wouldn't put a supervised injecting centre in an area where few people were injecting. Around the world we know that people who inject drugs will try and use the drugs soon after purchasing them.

Any location for a second supervised injecting facility needs to be where people are obtaining, purchasing and using drugs already. And a simple way this can be known is by looking at ambulance callouts and needle clean up data.

**Do residents and business owners need to be concerned about a facility in their proximity?**

I've been the medical director for 13 years at Sydney's service, and what I know is that while there are sometimes loud voices against our service, they most certainly do not represent the majority of voices in the local area. There have been multiple and repeated random surveys of the local residents and the local businesses in Kings Cross, both before we opened and since. Every single survey showed that the majority of residents and businesses support our continued operation, and do not want our service closed or moved.

This is because the area of Kings Cross now feels and looks tangibly different. Cleaner, safer, calmer. We have 80% reduction in ambulance callouts, 50% reduction in needle litter, and the service makes a positive difference not only to members of the local community who inject drugs, but those that used to deal with the impact too.

**What impact does relentlessly negative media coverage - without any voice for drug users or medical experts - do to drug users, their behaviour and their health outcomes?**

Drug use is a sensitive and emotive topic. As both a doctor, and a mother, I understand the fear that creeps into most discussions about drugs. The fear of something hurting those we love most. And often that something is not well understood. So media coverage, and the way we talk about these things has an impact on us all. I am privileged to have spent much of my life getting to know many different people who use drugs. What I have learnt is that they all have a story to tell, and I have met so many who have influenced me for the better. They have taught me about resilience, and the need to find ways of internally resolving past trauma and injustice. As with mental health and other medical areas, we need to include the voices of lived experience if we are to meaningfully engage and inform the debate for the better.