

Community Attitudes to Laws on Personal Drug Use: Survey of 4 NSW Electorates

ALICE SALOMON¹,

1. Social Justice Lead, Uniting, Sydney, Australia

Presenter's email: <asalomon@uniting.org>

Introduction and Aims: The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) has shown a steady increase in support for non-criminal consequences to personal possession of drugs. The Uniting 'Fair Treatment campaign', aims to decriminalise personal use and possession of drugs and increase access to drug treatment services. To inform the campaign, in June 2021 Uniting repeated the NDSHS in selected NSW electorates, surveying for voter intention.

Design and Methods: Market research company Ucomms was commissioned to undertake the poll in four electorates (Coffs Harbour, Monaro, Parramatta, Willoughby). 610 to 698 people in each electorate completed an automated multi-modal survey. The poll asked participants about what should happen to people found in possession of small quantities of the substances cannabis, ecstasy, heroin and methamphetamine.

Key findings: Across all drug types, 68.0% of respondents were in favour of a non-punitive response to possession. That is, no action, a warning, or referral to education or treatment. 57.0% of coalition voters and 76% of ALP voters were in favour of this response. 82.1% of respondents (75.8% coalition voters; 85.1% ALP voters) were in favour of a non-custodial response (ie as above plus a fine or community service). Support for non-punitive and non-custodial response varied by drug type and electoral district.

Discussions and Conclusions: There is comfortable majority (>60%) support for non-custodial responses to personal use of all four drug types in all four electorates; and majority (>55%) support for non-punitive responses in all electorates except Monaro (52.5% support for heroin; 46.5% for methamphetamines). These results are consistent with previous Australia-wide polling by the NDSHS. Our poll shows support in the community for a non-custodial response continues to increase and is majority supported across voter intention.

Implications for Practice or Policy: These findings add to the growing body of evidence in favour of drug law reform.

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