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ACT Prisoners' Voice on Needle Exchange

"The representation of ACT prisoners' views through an ex-prisoner who was excluded as a prisoner in a protected area is like a scab talking for a union – ridiculous! He goes on to [exonerate prison officers from trafficking and calls for more to be employed](#). It only gets less credible," says Justice Action Coordinator Brett Collins.

"This situation highlights the misrepresentation of and inability for prisoners to be heard. Several examples demonstrate how easy it is for government officials, prison officers, and other non-prisoner related people to misrepresent prisoners' interests. For example, the statement that mothers at Emu Plains were supportive of a [ban on their children visiting](#) and that Long Bay mental patients wanted to be [locked in their cells](#)" said Team member Geoff Brady.

"The accusation that prisoners do not want a Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) or that a NSP poses a threat to prisoners and staff is far from the facts and views held by prisoners and several major health and research organisations. For example, the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) published a [report](#) for the ACT government into the implementation of a NSP into the AMC, and The Burnet Institution published an [evaluation report](#) on the efficiency of drug policy and services at the AMC. Both argue that a NSP would be a beneficial program which reduces the harm caused by shared needles" said Ms Andrea Angeles.

"The PHAA report cited a Canadian study into 50 prisons across 12 countries that have adopted a NSP. Apart from NSPs being effective, it found that not one of those prisons had an incident where a syringe was used as a weapon. Furthermore, the safety of prison staff increased because of fewer accidents during searches caused by concealed syringes. A range of ancillary benefits were found including an improvement of relations between prisoners and prison staff" said Mr Brady.

"With 1/3 of prisoners having injected while in prison and 1 4 having done so in the previous month, it is no wonder prisoners are 60 times more likely than the general community to become affected by Hepatitis C. This figure alone provides enough support for a change" said Ms Angeles.

"A prisoner consultation must be initiated to ensure prisoners have a collective voice in the implementation of the program. It is the human right of association. This matter calls for urgent resolution to save lives, and taxpayers' money in a potential lawsuit for breach of the duty of care" said Mr Collins.

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