



## Drug Policy Modelling Program Overview

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Illicit drugs, their use and the associated harms are not going to be eliminated, but their impact can be significantly reduced. The ways in which drug policy is developed and implemented can have a major influence (both positively and negatively) on drug use, drug users and those around them. Throughout public policy, the use of best available evidence to inform decision-making is being actively sought. At the same time the provision of evidence alone can be insufficient to produce policy change.

### **The DPMP is concerned with both research and practice in illicit drug policy.**

The goal of DPMP is to create valuable new drug policy insights, ideas and interventions that will allow Australia to respond with alacrity and success to illicit drug use.

DPMP focuses on enabling a more comprehensive approach to drug policy; exploring dynamic interactions between law enforcement, prevention, treatment and harm reduction. It also integrates research and policy practice, examines national, state and local levels of policy making, is concerned with all illicit drugs, and uses new methods and tools.

The results of the feasibility stage of DPMP (2004 - 2005) are described in detail in the Stage One Monograph Series (<http://www.dpmp.unsw.edu.au>)

Over the next five years, DPMP will conduct rigorous research that provides independent, balanced, non-partisan policy analysis.

The areas of work include:

1. developing the evidence-base for policy;
2. developing, implementing and evaluating dynamic policy-relevant models of drug issues; and
3. studying policy-making processes in Australia.

### **Why "modelling"?**

Models are tools to aid thinking and to facilitate thoughtful policy debate. We use the term "modelling" because we see the use of models as core integrating tools – capable of synthesising across drug policy domains, across disciplines and across stakeholder perspectives. The modelling approaches we are using include agent-based models, system dynamics, participative systems models, cost-benefit models, and hybrid models: combining two or more of these and other approaches. The models will allow policy-makers to explore the impacts of a range of policy options.

### **There are four elements to DPMP:**

1. **Policy Research** – undertaking quantitative and qualitative policy analyses that accommodate the complexity of multiple domains, levels, drugs and outcomes. This will also involve studying the policy-making process. Projects include:
  - (i) Quantitative policy analysis of returns on investment across policy domains
  - (ii) Research into hybrid models that can explore complex dynamics
  - (iii) Study of the uptake of research evidence into policy, and the research-policy nexus
  - (iv) Study of how drug policy has been and is made in Australia
2. **Policy Practice** – engaging with policy-makers and providing them with policy analysis and solutions for the problems currently facing them. Projects include: a



- (i) Consultancy to governments on specific policy problems
- (ii) The application and evaluation of dynamic models to decision-making processes (testing scenarios with policy makers)
- (iii) Evaluation of the utility and relevance of DPMP information to policy-making processes

3. **Interventions** – conducting demonstration projects of new policy options under experimental conditions. Projects include:

- (i) Three demonstration projects of new law enforcement approaches at the local, state and federal levels
- (ii) Working with treatment, prevention and harm reduction researchers to add policy analyses to existing trials

4. **Foundational Research** – developing and maintaining policy relevant data, systems and approaches. Projects include:

- (i) A record linkage study – longitudinal cohort of injectors
- (ii) Working with economic data, such as drug prices, government spending, costs of interventions, cost savings and so on, for use in policy analyses
- (iii) Updating estimates of the prevalence and trends in drug use, harms and the effectiveness of interventions

The DPMP is a collaboration between the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (which houses the core team), the Australian National University, Griffith University and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre.

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### Interdisciplinarity

Our team spans Complex Systems Science, Criminology, Economics, Epidemiology, Integration and Implementation Sciences, Medicine, Political Science, Public Health, Public Policy, Sociology and Systems Thinking.

We aim to facilitate new drug policy insights, ideas and interventions that would not have been possible or apparent through the study of one aspect, or from one disciplinary perspective. Our interdisciplinary approach reflects the richness and complexity of the real world of drug use and drug policy.

For more information about this work see: Ritter, A., Bammer, G., Hamilton, M., Mazerolle, L. & the DPMP team. (2007) Effective drug policy: a new approach demonstrated in the Drug Policy Modelling Program. *Drug & Alcohol Review*, 26:3, 265-271.