



Speeches:
August 12th:

Speech at the launch of the "How to Drug Proof your Kids Program"

I am delighted to be here this morning to officially launch the newly revised 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids' program.

It is a cliché to observe that kids today are growing up faster than we did.

They are also presented with far more options, both good and bad, than previous generations. When it comes to alcohol and drugs, children are being forced to make choices that can affect the rest of their lives at far too young an age. The research into teenage drug use is particularly eye-opening. It shatters the illusions of any parent who believes that their teenage children are not being exposed to alcohol and illegal drugs. - 70 per cent of teenagers have used alcohol by the young age of 14 - 32 per cent of Australian 17 year olds have experimented with cannabis - Over 3.5 million cigarettes are smoked by teenagers every week. -32 per cent of 14-17 year olds binge drink, as do 64 per cent of 18-25 year olds.

These children are doing permanent damage to their growing bodies and developing brains. Alcohol and illicit drugs are involved in the majority of risky behaviour by young people, and in the majority of injuries and deaths. The impact of drug and alcohol abuse on the community is huge. The annual cost of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs is estimated at over \$30 billion. (Alcohol \$11.3 bil, tobacco \$12 bil and illicit drugs \$7.4 bil) This is the monetary cost of absenteeism, lost productivity, the extra burden on the health system and on the justice system. It doesn't begin to cover the emotional cost of grieving parents whose children have died of drug overdoses, in car crashes or as a result of alcohol-fuelled assaults.

As a Government, we have taken steps to reduce the impact of drugs and alcohol, most recently through our legislation to increase taxes on alcopops, which have been deliberately marketed to young Australians. However we recognise that protecting children from drugs and alcohol is a cultural issue. The whole of society needs to work to send the right messages to our children. Families are where we learn our values and our behaviours, and parents are necessarily the frontline in teaching their children about drugs and alcohol.

Teenage children often have a vexed and complex relationship with their parents. They certainly don't always listen to every piece of advice they receive. However it is clear that a strong parental example about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, can reduce the chances of teenagers abusing drugs or alcohol.

Parents remain the best way of steering children away from drugs. But parents often admit that they do not know the best way to talk to their children about drugs. They feel they don't know the facts, that things have changed too much since they were young, and they don't know the best arguments to make to their children.

This is why as part of the National Illicit Drug Strategy's Strengthening Families Program, we have extended funding for all agencies funded under the program until April 2010. Focus on the Family is one such organisation that provides practical and professional aid. They share our belief that prevention is far better than cure.

We recognise the important work of 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids' in assisting families. For this reason the Australian Government is providing further funding of more than \$185,000 to continue this successful program. This is on top of the \$1 million FaHCSIA has already provided the organisation to date. "How to Drug Proof Your Kids" is a program aimed at the parents of children aged 8 to14.

For those who think that's young, don't forget that 72 per cent of children have already tried alcohol by 14. It is clear that it is never too early to talk to you children about the dangers of drugs, to establish those lines of communication that will be needed as they get older.

This program is not merely a neatly packaged set of answers, nor does it naively tell young people to just say "no". It does not pretend that there is any one simple solution towards addressing what has become a complex issue in our society. But it does concentrate on the important role a parent or other adult caregiver can play in reducing the risk of harmful drug use. It also equips parents to establish protective factors that will assist their children to make good choices.

The program highlights the risks of both illegal and legal drugs, with a particular emphasis on Alcohol. Alcohol related issues covered include the latest National Health and Medical Research Council drinking guidelines, latest research around brain development in adolescence, and the damage that can be done by binge drinking.

Since it was first developed in Australia in 1999, 2,500 facilitators have been trained and they in turn have provided education and training for over 51,000 parents across the nation. The program has also been successfully implemented in 11 countries including Canada, New Zealand, the UK, France and the USA, and interest has been shown by many more.

The Rudd Government remains determined to stamp out the scourge of illegal drugs and reduce the damage done by the misuse of alcohol.

Drugs tear families apart, they weaken our community, and they destroy lives – and we are genuine in our determination to wipe them out. Alcohol is a part of our nation's history and its culture, but we must also be aware of the dangers of alcohol abuse and the damage it does to society. The National Drug Strategy has been successful in seeing an overall decline in drug use in Australia over recent years. Its great strength has been close cooperation between law enforcement, health agencies and experts.

Drug use is a problem that must be tackled on all fronts. I would like to take this opp in closing to thank everyone. I think as we would all understand, parents are DNA hard-wired to protect their children and to see their children do better than in fact they themselves have done. I hope this venture reinforces that DNA of love that exists in all parents.

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