Preview Image

The process of law reform is very important in developing and improving the legal system by implementing enhanced laws to ensure the safety of a community. Within Australia, preventative methods have been established to benefit the nation by removing the risks that can arise from the use and possession of illicit drugs.

In 1999 the New South Wales Drug Court was formed with the aim of reducing the reoffending rate of drug-related crimes. The NSW Drug Court offered a drug program that proved to be considerably effective after an evaluation in 2002 by both the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and the Centre for Health Economics Research and Evaluation. The evaluation showed that the program was more cost effective than prison, saving the Government and taxpayers around $1.758 million annually. The evaluation also revealed that offenders, after being admitted into the program, were 17% less likely to recommit any offences, 30% less likely to recommit a violent offence and 38% less likely to be reconvicted of a drug offence. This program is effective in achieving justice for not only the NSW Community by reducing both the risks of drug related crimes and the amount of money paid by taxpayers to keep drug-related offenders incarcerated, but also the drug offenders by ensuring their personal safety and wellbeing.

Harm reduction is another technique set up by the Australian Government in order to minimise any risks associated with the harming of a person or others directly or indirectly due to the use of illicit drugs. One of the most popular harm reduction methods used is called the needle and syringe program. The needle and syringe program is a health measure applied by the government to prevent the spread of disease by the provision of sterile injecting equipment, education on drug use, providing health information and supporting referral to drug treatment, medical care and legal and social services. The Australian government invested $243 million into this scheme over a 9 year period and in turn, saved around $1.28 billion in relation to direct health care costs due to the reduction of cases involving HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C. The needle and syringe program results in just outcomes for drug users as their risk of disease and infection due to drug use decreases dramatically and their knowledge broadens on the effects of drug use due to the education programs offered within the scheme. The Australian government and society also benefit as they save a large sum of money due to reduced medical costs.

As well as this, the concept of drug decriminalisation has sparked a variety of debates worldwide. Amongst the Australian population, there are very strong opinions, both for and against the effectiveness of drug decriminalisation and whether it should become legal in all states of Australia.

The decriminalisation of drugs involves permitting the use and possession of illicit drugs to a certain extent, in order to reduce the amount of deaths and health issues that can arise from drug use. It is thought by some that the decriminalisation of drugs could possibly lead to more cases of drug abuse and more crimes due to the fact that drugs would be readily available. On the other hand, many people argue that drug decriminalisation will ensure a safer society as the main focus is not on jailing offenders but instead decreasing the risk of death and disease and treatment.

The decriminalisation of drugs has proved to be a success in Portugal. Five years after drugs were decriminalised, deaths from street drug overdoses had dropped from around 400 to 290 per year and cases of HIV plummeted from 1400 people to 400 people in 2006. The decriminalisation of drugs throughout Australia would most likely be effective and result in just outcomes for society as the likelihood of a safer society is increased due to more treatment and control programs; as well as just outcomes for drug users as they are able to learn to control their usage or abstain from drugs entirely.

There are a variety of programs and schemes that have been put into action to prevent and treat drug usage throughout Australia and have proved to be highly effective as they have resulted in just outcomes amongst the Australian society and the drug users themselves.