

POLICY FUTURES

A Reform Agenda



The case for effective mandated substance abuse treatment for young people

Too many children and young people appearing before Children's Courts have severe substance abuse and/or mental health issues and do not engage in treatment. This leads to a revolving door of substance abuse and offending.

The 'What Can be Done' (WCBD) Model of Court-ordered, mandated treatment (Youth Therapeutic Orders) aims to break this cycle and steer young people in a different trajectory. It is informed by key learnings from international models of adolescent facilities in Sweden, England, Scotland and New Zealand.

Magistrate Jennifer Bowles
2014 Churchill Fellow, Victoria

Key Policy Recommendations

1

Federal Government leadership. For the Federal Government to lead the national response for effective mandated substance abuse treatment for young people by:

- supporting the WCBD Model;
- taking the Model to National Cabinet; and
- providing funding to the States and Territories to support the establishment of the WCBD Model.

2

Enable Children's Courts to mandate treatment for youth with severe substance abuse issues. State and territory governments throughout Australia should legislate for Children's Courts to have the power to make Youth Therapeutic Orders.

3

Provision for therapeutic treatment facilities. That funding be provided for the establishment and operation of secure therapeutic homes, step down residences and onsite education and training facilities. Critical features of the WCBD model include the homely nature of the facilities, committed staff, group and individual counselling, a therapeutic community incorporating democratic principles, a culturally safe space and external scrutiny.

4

Effective and on-going transition arrangements. That funding be provided to ensure effective after care and transition arrangements for young people on a Youth Therapeutic Order.

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