



Coalition of Alcohol and Drug Educators

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Media Release:

Road Toll Climbing – Drug Driving a Key Factor!

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Our road toll is climbing and whilst distractions to drivers are a contributing factor, *the rapid increase in drug driving is significant, but glossed over. Why?*

After three consecutive years of reporting that drug driving was responsible for more deaths than drink driving¹ it seems that reporting has stopped; again, *why?*

Is it because such statistics, such reported harms to road users and families, will undermine the agenda of some politicians whose aim is to unleash even greater drug use into our community and then onto our roads through further liberalised illicit drug policy?

The recent absurd push of some short sighted, pro-drug politicians, promoting the legalisation or decriminalisation of these same driver impairing substances, are not only multiplying the harm creating factors on our state and nations roads, but adding to other growing community and familial dysfunctions.

Whilst introducing tougher new Drink/Drug Driving penalties in 2018², the Victorian State Government is now budgeting to do less drug tests for road users. You add to that a simultaneous push to legalise Cannabis, and you can be sure that this horrendous road toll statistic is only going to climb!

According to **State of the Road** Drug Driving Fact Sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety:

- Drug driving is a contributing factor in up to 41% of road fatalities in Australia
- Drug use increases the risk of crash involvement, with the risk estimated to be equal to that of a driver with a blood alcohol concentration of up to 0.15%³

In 2015, (latest available) the NSW Police Force commenced legal action against 8,253 people for driving with an illicit drug present in their system. *This is an increase of 252%, up from 2,347 in 2014.*⁴

But the pending data is predicting much worse to come.

Very recently, the N.S.W. Roads Minister **Andrew Constance** has responded and is on record saying, *'NSW is taking a "zero-tolerance" approach to drink and drug-driving'*.⁵ This includes immediate license suspension or cancellation for even low-level offences.

Despite data being slow to emerge, or lessened by under-reporting, or other ubiquitous excuses, the trajectory of the evidence is clear – things are only going to get worse, and it will be substance use that will be the biggest contributor to this growing crisis.

Whilst Crystal Meth is a key element, Cannabis use is a significant impairment. We don't have to repeat the utter stupidity of the United States to learn the hard lessons.

The following US Data⁶ is but a snapshot of the issues emerging there:

According to AAA, Washington experienced a doubling in drugged-driving fatalities in the years following legalization (Johnson, 2016).

The percentage of marijuana offenses among those driving under the influence of drugs (DUIDs) have also risen in Colorado, with 76% of state-wide DUIDs involving marijuana (CSP, 2017). When alcohol is added, the percentage number is 17%, a 25% increase since 2012.



“Drugged driving and motor vehicle fatalities have increased in states that have legalized recreational marijuana. According to a 2014 report by the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), about 50% of fatal crashes nationally involved drivers whose blood tests were positive for THC (WTSC, 2016). In states where marijuana is legalized, collision claims have also increased: the number of drivers in Colorado intoxicated with marijuana and involved in fatal traffic crashes increased 88% from 2013–2015 and marijuana-related traffic deaths increased 66% between the four-year averages before and after legalization (Highway Loss Data Institute, 2017; Migoya, 2017; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA),

In Oregon, 50% of all drivers assessed by DREs in 2015 tested positive for THC. Toxicology reports show that the rate of drivers testing positive for THC has increased at a consistent rate, resulting in an increase in THC-related impaired driving (OLCC, 2016).

While many factors contribute to pedestrian fatalities, it turns out that states that legalized marijuana for medical and/or recreational use saw a 16.4 percent surge in such deaths in the first six months of 2017 compared to the first six months of 2016, while non-legal states saw a drop of 5.8 percent in pedestrian fatalities over the same time (Boudette, 2018).”⁶

All road users need to be as safe as possible. However, Governments must understand that any measure they introduce by legislation that leads to, facilitates, enables, or actively permits even greater use of these psychotropic, culpable driving causing toxins will inevitably be accountable for the physical, emotional, psychological and fiscal harms incurred.

Non-drug taking road users and their families are not only at greater risk, but also end up ‘footing the bill’ for the dangerous conduct of drug affected drivers.

We say we don’t want a ‘nanny state’! If so, then all fiscal responsibility needs to land on the parties causing the harm and those who permitted it, NOT the non-drug using taxpayer!

If the ‘invoice’ for all these harms was placed at the feet of the politicians and the respective parties that sponsored/voted for such reckless legislation, then the majority of such ‘ideas’ as legalising marijuana would not see the light of day.

Drink and Drug Free Roads are Safer Roads! If ZERO is our Road Toll target, then ZERO tolerance needs to be the policy!

References

- 1 <https://www.caradvice.com.au/407556/drugs-responsible-for-more-victorian-road-fatalities-than-alcohol-for-third-year-running/>
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- 3 Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety (Queensland) **State of the Road** Drug Driving Fact Sheet (2017)
<https://research.qut.edu.au/carrsq/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2017/04/Drug-Driving-screen.pdf>
- 4 https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_news/Drug-driving-map.aspx (latest Available)
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