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### Submission into the implementation of a Needle and Syringe Program in the Alexander Maconochie Centre

The Australian Democrats strongly commend the ACT Government for having established the Alexander Maconochie Centre within a human rights framework.

Such a framework has allowed the ACT to adopt world's best practice in promoting rehabilitation within its prison system. The Australian Democrats welcome the continued operation of the prison on human rights principles. We therefore support the adoption of harm minimisation approaches such as a needle and syringe program, believing the health of inmates and the safety of prison officers can be best protected in such a way.

The "Canberra Times" has recently quoted the Chief Minister, after meeting with the prison officers union, as saying it was becoming increasingly difficult to find middle ground with them on the matter of implementing a needle and syringe program (NSP) in the prison.

There is an assumption within that statement that middle ground must be found. We note that the union has been implacably opposed to the NSP from the very first suggestion that there be one: the union is clearly not seeking any middle ground.

The Australian Democrats submit that when there are two arguments they are not always necessarily equal and this is certainly the case in this instance. On one hand there is the fear – and not the evidence – of prison officers that the NSP would place them at risk, and on the other there is solid evidence of NSPs working in other prisons around the world. In this instance the two arguments are not of equal weight. **Our decisions should be made on evidence and not on fears.**

There are now many high profile people calling for the establishment of NSPs in prisons across Australia. These include health professionals, such as the former secretary of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation, Dr Patricia Armstrong Grant OBE AC, former secretary of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation, Professor Michael Good AO, chair of the National Health and Medical Research Council and

Professor Peter Baume AC, former Liberal Federal Minister for Health and ANU Chancellor.<sup>1</sup> The full list of names can be found here.<sup>2</sup>

If the provision of equipment was to be supervised by a nurse, as ought to be the case, and as happens in other places throughout the world, then prison officers should have little cause for concern. The professional association Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australia has the knowledge and the expertise and that should be sought by the ACT Government in assisting it to implement a NSP.

It is the role of Members of Parliament to make their decisions based on a rational evaluation of the harm and the good, and not based on which group can create the greatest pressure. As an advertisement in the Canberra Times (14/1/2011) from the group Anex states, "numerous Needle and Syringe Programs have been implemented successfully in prisons overseas and syringes have **never been used as a weapon against prisons staff**".<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Democrats encourage the adoption of the recommendations of the Moore Report, especially Model 3 for a contained NSP. The ACT *Corrections Management Act 2007* should be amended to facilitate the NSP.

The ACT Government should therefore introduce a Needle and Syringe Program into the Alexander Maconachie Centre which, when implemented, will no doubt become the example to the rest of the nation on how to proceed with this issue.

The Australian Democrats thank you for consideration of our submission.

Yours sincerely,



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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.danaonline.org/?p=401>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.anex.org.au/prisons-supporters/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.anex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Canberra-Times-Advertisement.pdf>