

PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Introduction

The following is a position statement on psychoactive substances prepared by Population Health, Waikato District Health Board (DHB).

The position statement is intended to provide a high-level policy position for our organisation and guide local response across our DHB catchment and broader as required.

The Waikato District Health Board’s position

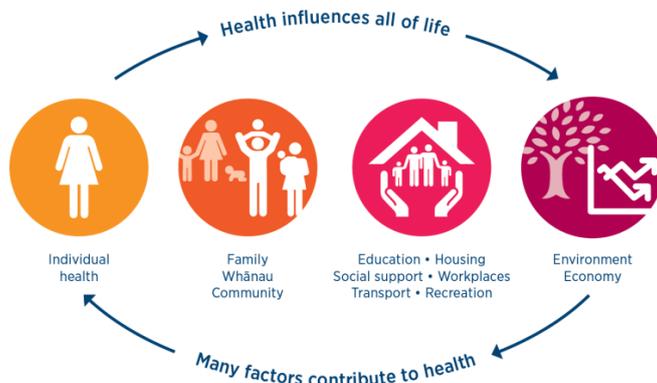
The Waikato DHB recognises the use of psychoactive substance as a risk factor in a wide range of adverse health conditions. Although the Psychoactive Substances Act 2013 legalises the use of these products, psychoactive substances have the potential to harm individuals both acutely and through long term use. Psychoactive substance use can often affect those who are not even consumers, but third parties affected by decisions of others.

Waikato DHB will

1. Support Territorial Authorities in achieving the purpose of the Act through information provision
2. Perform regulatory role in terms of monitoring licences with partner agencies
3. Monitor evidence of health related harm associated with Psychoactive Substance use
4. Provide health related assistance to users of Psychoactive Substances as appropriate

Health links and the wider environment

Wellbeing is a dynamic process across the life-course. This is reflected in the Ministry of Health’s (2016) representation of health in the wider context (figure 1) which illustrates the various factors that contribute to health and the way in which health influences people’s lives.[1]



Source: NZ Health Strategy (2016)

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Radical improvement in Maori Health Outcomes by Eliminating Health Inequities for Māori

Health disparities are significant contributors to the burden of disease. A key strategic priority for the Waikato DHB is to achieve a radical improvement in Maori health outcomes by eliminating health inequities for Māori.[2] Waikato DHB position statements contribute to the DHB's commitment to reducing health inequities to improve health and wellbeing for Māori.

Key information

Psychoactive substances have been present in New Zealand since the early 2000's. These substances mimic the effects of illegal products such as cannabis and ecstasy. Successive governments have banned ingredients of these products as they were found to cause harm, only for new ingredients to replace them.

The health impacts of psychoactive substance use are still relatively unknown, but there is growing evidence that use may have several adverse health effects. These include cardiovascular problems, psychological disorders including psychosis, seizures and severe withdrawal symptoms upon ceasing use[3]. The long term health effects are hard to determine, given to the nature of products, which can vary in ingredients from packet to packet[4].

The Psychoactive Substances Act 2013 legalises the sale, supply and use of approved psychoactive substances in New Zealand.

The purpose of the Act is to minimize harm to the user of psychoactive substances[5]. A large number of measures have been introduced in order to achieve this purpose:

- Restrictions on locations of sale of products, including a ban on all dairies, petrol stations and alcohol outlets. A licence will be required to sell psychoactive substances. This has led to a 95% reduction in premises selling psychoactive substances.
- Products must be tested and proven to pose no more than a low risk of harm to the user before they can be sold. All products must have health warnings.
- Purchase age of 18
- Labelling and packaging requirements and restrictions on advertising

The Act reverses the onus of proof onto manufacturers, who must prove their products are "low risk" before they can be sold.

The Act also allows Territorial Authorities to create their own Local Approved Products Policy (LAPP). The policy may not limit the number of licences in the district, but can restrict where in the district products can be sold.

There are currently 12 interim licences to sell psychoactive substances in the Waikato DHB region. Licences for sale of psychoactive substances will be granted by the Ministry of Health.

Public Health has appointed staff as enforcement officers, and is charged with monitoring licensees to ensure they are meeting their obligations under the Act.

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References

- [1] Ministry of Health, "Health in the wider context of people's lives," 2016, Available: <https://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/new-zealand-health-strategy-future-direction/health-wider-context-peoples-lives>.
- [2] Waikato District Health Board, " Waikato District Health Board Strategy: Healthy People Excellent Care," 2016.
- [3] K. A. Seely, J. Lapoint, J. H. Moran, and L. Fattore, "Spice drugs are more than harmless herbal blends: a review of the pharmacology and toxicology of synthetic cannabinoids," *Progress in Neuro-psychopharmacology and biological psychiatry*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 234-243, 2012.
- [4] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The challenge of new psychoactive substances.," in "Psychoactive Substances Act 2013, s3.," UNODC, Vienna2013.
- [5] Ministry of Health, "Psychoactive Substances Act 2013, s3.," in "New Zealand Legislation," Wellington2013, Available: <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2013/0053/latest/DLM5278431.html>.

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