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## Substance abuse is a health problem, not a welfare problem

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UnitingCare Australia urges the Government once again to abandon the flawed Drug Testing Bill before Parliament today.

Those unfortunate enough to be battling addiction need support services and counselling, not humiliation and welfare quarantining.

There is a consensus of voices from across the organisations who work with the most vulnerable people in Australia demanding a preventive, evidence-based approach.

UnitingCare Australia, National Director, Claerwen Little said today "This trial will stigmatise those who rely on Newstart and Youth Allowance while doing nothing to address the underlying causes and effects of addiction.

"There is also no indication that punitive compliance practices on welfare recipients work. This legislation deflects attention from the underlying factors that drive inequality and poverty while scapegoating people who receive income support.

"The trial is counter-productive.

"If the Government is genuinely committed to preventing the harms associated with drug and alcohol use, it would be increasing investment in cost-effective prevention, treatment and harm reduction measures – such as those outlined in the National Drug Strategy.

"This bill, like the Cashless Debit Card, is a distraction. The government needs to be focusing their efforts on the woefully inadequate Newstart allowance," concluded Ms Little.

*UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people each year across urban, rural and remote communities.*

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