



Key Insights:

Mental health, addiction, and drug and alcohol abuse

Health-focussed approach to alcohol, drugs and addiction

Participants want a health-focussed approach to drug laws. They recommend a joined-up response across the whole-of-government and community sectors to support people experiencing mental health or addiction issues instead of penalising them. Responses advise that health-focussed interventions, such as residential services, are more productive in reducing drug-related harm than criminal penalties.

- “ Get cross political support for change. Treat drug addiction as a health issue. Put appropriate resources in to deal with this. ”
- “ Drug use should not be punished – should be treated as a health issue not a justice issue. Need more residential beds, and to deal with underlying mental health problems as well. ”
- “ Invest in drug treatment/support services instead of criminal responses to drug use/addiction. ”
- “ Early intervention when whanau are in difficulty. Address issues re poverty, illiteracy, mental health and drug/alcohol addiction. ”
- “ Work across government departments and community sectors to develop a strategy to eliminate the underlying causes of offending (poverty, education, addiction, health etc). ”

Drug law reform

Several responses advocate a decriminalised approach to drug legislation characterised by being more health-focussed. Responses highlight the need for any reform to be responsive to community and cultural concerns; for example, Māori should influence decision-making about reforms which impact their people.

- “ Support is growing for drug reform, across all ages, particularly for decriminalisation. ”
- “ Our [drug] laws prevent people accessing help when they need it and they leave thousands every year with a conviction that impacts on employment, relationships and travel. ”
- “ Unless we decriminalise & regulate drugs we are never going to really address issues – cos convictions are a barrier. ”
- “ If people are not worried about the outcome, more will come forward to seek help. E.g. drug addicts. ”
- “ Decriminalisation of ALL drugs and take the end user focus from justice department to health department. ”

Easily accessible, recovery-focussed mental health and addiction services

Responses suggest mental health and addiction services should be resourced so anyone can access support when they want it. The duration of access to these services needs to be sufficient to support recovery - recognising that helping through addiction or mental health issues may take a long time. Many responses highlight the importance of basic rights, such as access to secure housing and income, and the ability to practise cultural customs, as being important to supporting mental health.

- “ Mental health education for everyone, including people who provide services, including historical trauma, and personal mental health. ”
- “ Need more resources to allow counselling, blanket counselling, rather than just a risk-based assessment and allowing eligibility based on just high needs – all needs are high needs. ”
- “ Mental health and drug facilities for people with addiction issues – not prison. ”
- “ Better access to mental health care for prisoners – requires resource increase not just refer more people. ”
- “ More facilities and support systems in place for those with mental health issues so that these people don't find their way into the criminal justice system. ”
- “ ...This would likely have ongoing benefits around health/education/mental health if vulnerable families no longer have to stress out about secure accommodation for example. ”
- “ Released on parole...Need to get support for longer. Got into trouble – really tried [but] couldn't get a job, didn't have enough money. Turned to marijuana – re-called. ”

Method

We sought to engage New Zealanders in a national conversation about the future direction of our criminal justice system.

INFORMATION CAPTURE METHODS INCLUDE:

- Around 220 face-to-face events across the country
- Around 150 submissions to the programme email addresses
- Around 160 submissions to a web survey on the Hāpaitia website
- Information captured during the national Criminal Justice Summit, held August 2018

COMMUNITIES WE VISITED



WHO DID WE SPEAK TO?

- NGOs
- Iwi
- Judiciary
- Lived experience (Victims, Offenders)
- Court Users
- Academics
- Frontline staff
- Community/NZ Public

TECHNICAL NOTE:

- Information presented here is based on qualitative information captured as part of a nationwide public conversation about the criminal justice system led by Te Uepū (Safe and Effective Justice Advisory Group) between August 2018 and April 2019.
- The results are based on individuals and organisations that took part in the public conversation and are not representative of the New Zealand population.
- The number of responses under each category are relatively small and therefore the results should be treated as indicative only.
- This information presented in this summary is based on a one-off data collection and will not be replicated.

