



# MEDIA RELEASE:

## Public Health Association of Australia & ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre

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### Health groups call for Needle & Syringe Program in ACT prison

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and the ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre are calling on the ACT Government to introduce a needle and syringe program (NSP) in the Alexander Maconochie Centre in 2011. Both health groups believe the introduction of an NSP in the gaol would have far-reaching public health benefits for the broader community.

“Rates of injecting drug use among prisoners and the availability of clean injecting equipment need to be considered in the prison context because most prisoners spend relatively short periods of time behind bars and then return to their families and communities. Rates of blood-borne viruses among prisoners therefore impact on our ability to reduce their spread in the broader community, and also create an occupational health and safety concern for prison staff,” explained Melanie Walker, PHAA Deputy CEO & ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre Spokesperson.

“While the ACT prison has worked hard to deliver best-practice drug rehabilitation programs, there will always be some prisoners who choose not to engage with these programs at any given time. These people may well go on to engage in rehabilitation in the future, have families and live long and productive lives. It is vital that these people, their families and the broader community are protected from the spread of blood-borne viruses.

“PHAA and the ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre support a harm reduction approach to policy in relation to minimising the harms from illicit drug use. Harm reduction measures, such as the establishment of an NSP in the prison, coupled with complementary demand reduction and supply reduction measures, make up a comprehensive approach to addressing drug-related problems in both prisons and the Australian community.

“Unfortunately, research worldwide has consistently shown that despite the best efforts to ensure that drugs do not get into prisons, small amounts will slip through the cracks in the system and it is important that contingency plans are in place to deal with this. Many other countries have managed to implement successful NSPs in prisons and the ACT Government should be supported to do the same in 2011,” said Ms Walker.

#### **For further information/comment**

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