



## Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

**Submission Number:** 175  
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Submission to the Honourable Linda Burney Federal MP for Barton  
and The Hon Steve Kamper State MP for Rockdale.

Regarding the appalling lack of functional help in our state and country  
for alcoholics, drug addicts and their families

I have come face to face with the lack of help and wasteful, inappropriate and non-functional treatment of alcoholics or drug addicts who have reached the point of not being able to help themselves because of serious addiction and a loss of free will to decide what is best for them who live in our community. This is a burgeoning problem area brought about by the dreadful frustration people of all ages in our communities face due to homelessness, unemployment and loss of an acceptable lifestyle due to an ever worsening financial situation and chronic stress for many people. Some people are in this predicament because of trauma they have had to live through as victims of abuse and domestic violence, others have resorted to drugs and alcohol to escape reality and their own feelings of misery and lack of confidence, love and support.

These people need help they are not getting. They need professional help from the medical profession that they cannot access. If they are unable to control an addiction they need to be put in a situation where that addiction is controlled for them and where they have a chance to reassess their lives without the destructive props of alcohol and drugs. What they absolutely need is Involuntary Rehabilitation and it is practically impossible to access. There are only 12 beds in Involuntary for the whole state of NSW, 8 in Orange and 4 in Sydney and I imagine it is the same in the other states of Australia. There need to be at least 200 beds to augment the 12 beds.

What happens to the people who are out of control due to the dreadful disease of alcoholism or drug addiction? They are picked up off the streets unconscious and put in an ambulance and taken to emergency where they are discharged as soon as they can stagger out because the hospitals are short of beds. They go straight back to get more alcohol or drugs and are picked up by an ambulance again, sometimes 3 times a day. They are nearly always on Centrelink payments because they can't hold down a job, so the tax payers pay for their use of ambulances \$447.35 for less than 5 km, and hospital beds in public hospitals are an average cost \$669 a day for 2023. Their desperate families ring the police for a safety check when they don't know where they are, but do know what condition they are going to be in and that they are vulnerable to being robbed and raped so the police waste valuable time hunting for them for hours, once again using taxpayers money in an already overworked and under staffed system, and they are once again usually dropped off at hospital and discharged when they become conscious. This goes on while they destroy their bodies and minds and become a burden to society, themselves, and friends and family. These people are not no-hopers! They are often well qualified, well trained and have been exemplary members of society, great daughters, sons, wives, husbands, fathers and mothers and so on. With the right help they could get back their lives, but that is not going to happen until a lot is done to provide involuntary help for those that desperately need it.

What about all the voluntary rehabs? There are 4 government funded voluntary

rehab in NSW with huge waiting lists. There are many more private voluntary rehabs and families can pay for health funds to cover most of their costs if they have been classified as hospitals, but if a person has very serious cravings and is being put in these hospitals by their desperate families, they can leave whenever they like instead of doing the course, or relapse soon after getting out.

So how can someone who is a terribly addicted drug addict or alcoholic get away from their addictive substance? Only by going to prison after being caught doing some petty crime like stealing a bottle from a liquor outlet. Even then they will not be sent to prison but will be given conditions by a magistrate that they will break straight away, like an abstinence clause for 6 months and not being allowed to enter alcoholic premises. That will not last even one day but they will not be arrested for at least a month getting all the time closer to dying from substance abuse. Then the magistrate is likely to repeat the conditions and another month goes past. Of course the magistrate does not want to put them in prison where they will not get the help they so desperately need, but prison is the only place they can go to to get away from substance abuse because of the lack of Involuntary Rehabilitation Centres in our Community. If they existed they would be a perfect place for helping and restoring these people to society provided they had caring and well qualified staff, councillors, psychiatrists, and psychologists working in them, care which they do not get in prison.

What about the cost? It would certainly benefit many people in society if it could be met, not just the victims, but also their friends and families and the general public who has to witness the sad scene of a helpless person lying under a bush in their recreational areas. I think it would be economical to stop all this misuse of ambulances, hospitals and police and get these people back on their feet and back into jobs and homes and back into using their skills and paying taxes for the benefit of society. They have all been educated and looked after for many years and society needs them.

I note that the Federal Minister for Barton is the Minister for Indigenous Australians. You will be aware that the percentage for substance use disorder is higher for indigenous people than for the general community. Our goal is to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so they particularly need the help that Involuntary Rehabilitation could give. Indigenous Australians made up 32% of prison inmates (30 June 2022) how many of them could have benefited from Involuntary Rehabilitation and avoided prison?

Please fight for more places in Involuntary Rehabilitation Centres and save the lives of so many citizens. Stop the waste of taxpayers' money. Everyone deserves a hand up.

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