

FACT SHEET

Public Health (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2015

The *Public Health (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2015* proposes to repeal the *HIV/AIDS Preventive Measures Act 1993* and make various amendments to the *Public Health Act 1997*.

Repeal of the HIV/AIDS Preventive Measures Act 1993

Since the introduction of the *HIV/AIDS Preventive Measures Act 1993* (HIV Act), HIV infection is now managed as a chronic communicable disease rather than a terminal illness, due to antiviral treatments.

The Act is now out-of-date and is regarded as no longer being best clinical practice, overly prescriptive, and superseded by other legislation, most notably the *Public Health Act 1997*.

The Bill repeals the HIV Act and transfers the needle and syringe program to the *Public Health Act 1997*. This consolidates the prevention and management of all communicable diseases under one Act.

The Needle and Syringe Program (NSP)

The NSP is a long-standing and important public health initiative that distributes unused equipment to injecting drug users through approximately 100 outlets (mainly pharmacies and healthcare organisations, and a small number of vending machines).

The program significantly lowers the risk of harm associated with injecting drugs and reduces the spread of blood born viruses such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV. Each jurisdiction in Australia has a needle and syringe program.

The revised NSP will remain a permit based scheme administered by the Director of Public Health. Healthcare providers and businesses will be required to obtain a permit and staff supplying equipment must undertake approved training.

Existing impediments to the lawful distribution of unused equipment among injecting drug users will be eased by limiting the permit requirement to organisations and businesses; and by extending existing exemption from certain offences and crimes around the possession and supply of equipment, and trace elements within used equipment.

Miscellaneous amendments to the Public Health Act 1997

In addition to including a revised needle and syringe program, the Bill makes a number of other amendments to the *Public Health Act* regarding emergency management, disease management, tobacco control, drinking water management, the Cervical Screening Register, and the disclosure of information.

Whilst the changes do not represent a set of significant policy reforms, they are considered important and necessary to:

- ensure the powers and functions of the Director of Public Health and councils as regulators are clear;
- ensure the Act better supports more contemporary public health practices; and
- maintain the purpose of the Act and enhance its effectiveness as the centrepiece of public health legislation in Tasmania.

Amendments to the Corrections Act 1997

There are also a small number of consequential amendments to the *Corrections Act 1997* as a result of the repeal of the *HIV/AIDS Preventive Measures Act*.