



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Illicit Drugs**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 23 October 2017**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Monday, 23 October 2017  <b>Page</b> 185  <b>Questioner</b>  <b>Speaker</b> O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p><b>Source</b> House  <b>Proof</b> Yes  <b>Responder</b>  <b>Question No.</b></p>
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**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (19:11): I rise in the chamber today in enthusiastic support of the member for Tangney's motion acknowledging the commitment of the Turnbull government and the hard work of our law enforcement agencies, health workers and support services in fighting illicit drugs, and in particular, crystal meth, or ice. New data from the ABS shows that 1,808 Australians died from drugs in 2016. While some were drug suicides, the vast majority were accidental overdoses.

The numbers that define Australia's drug problem are distressing to contemplate. One very big number is that illicit drugs, especially ice, are costing Australia an estimated \$4.4 billion annually, due mainly to health care, crime and other economic costs. Beyond the high financial cost, there is of course a horrendous human cost. The evidence of broken lives is both compelling and plain to see. Contrary to recent evidence of a slight fall in ice use, statistics for drug use and overdose deaths show dramatic year-on-year increases. *Australia's annual overdose report 2016*, from the Penington Institute, reveals that drug overdose deaths in Australia continue to climb, showing a shocking 61 per cent increase in the 10 years from 2004 to 2014. This is an appalling statistic, one that leads the Penington Institute to describe Australia's overdose crisis as severe. And, contrary to popular misconception, it's not young urban Australians that are accounting for the explosion in drug use and overdose deaths. In 2014, overdose deaths per capita were, and continue to be, far higher in rural and regional areas, showing an 83 per cent increase between 2008 and 2014, with the abuse of prescription drugs accounting for even more deaths than illicit drugs. Between 2008 and 2014, there was an 87 per cent increase in prescription opioid deaths in Australia, and that statistic skyrocketed to a 148 per cent increase in rural and regional areas. It's perhaps worth noting that the second national wastewater drug monitoring report, showing test results for 13 illicit drugs at 37 different sites across Australia, capturing data for about 51 per cent of our population, found that ice remains the most highly used illicit drug in Australia.

This motion correctly acknowledges that the Turnbull government is deeply committed to turning the tide on Australia's drug problem by allocating significant resources to a sophisticated, multilayered approach that addresses both supply and demand and also harm caused by illicit drugs, especially ice. The government's National Ice Action Strategy does just this. On the supply side, the government is improving resources for law enforcement to police our borders and streets and to stop the supply of ice and other illicit drugs. On the demand side, we're investing almost \$300 million to boost funding for treatment, after-care, education, prevention and community engagement—all aimed at reducing demand and delivering effective support to help users quit. Commencing in November 2015, Taskforce Blaze, an ongoing joint operation between the Australian Federal Police and the Chinese National Narcotics Control Commission, has provided incredibly successful results and is helping stop the flow of ice into Australia. To date, some 13 tonnes of drugs and precursors, including six tonnes of ice, have been stopped as a result.

Like other members of this House, I too have seen evidence of what drugs do to families and communities. Just last May in my electorate of Fairfax I joined the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection with senior law enforcement officers, including from the AFP, Queensland Police Service and Australian Border Force, for a special roundtable briefing on the drug problem. My eyes were opened not just to the extent and cost of the problem but to the dedication and resourcefulness of our enforcement border agencies. Each and every one of us have a job to do to help resolve this scourge of drugs. *(Time expired)*