

Drugs and sport

Information and guidelines for clubs



Introduction

This document aims to provide committee members of community sporting clubs with useful information about illegal drugs and a guide on how to manage the issue should it arise in the club. It is important that the club has a planned approach based on best practice and with the welfare of its players and members as the major priority. The first section outlines general information and section two provides answers to common questions.

Illegal drugs

Illegal drugs are used by many people in the community, including young adults, so it is likely that some members of your club will have access to them. Currently there are two distinct but related illegal drug issues confronting sporting clubs:

- performance enhancing drugs
- illegal drugs used for social purposes (e.g. at parties, raves, in the home, at the club, etc).

These two categories are not mutually exclusive. Some illegal drugs used for social purposes (such as amphetamines, e.g. speed) may be used in an attempt to enhance sporting performance.

Drugs used for performance enhancement

While performance enhancing drug use may occur in some community sporting clubs, it is more likely to arise in elite sport. Most national sporting organisations have a policy on performance enhancing drugs which details legal considerations and testing procedures. Whilst such policies may apply to community sport, an examination of them is beyond the scope of this document. Contact your state or national sporting organisation to determine if there are any drug-related policies for your sport or the Australian Sports Anti Doping Authority (ASADA) for assistance.

Club jurisdiction

It should be understood that when this document refers to drug use at the club, it includes the club premises and functions/events that are organised by the club and/or take place under the club's jurisdiction, regardless of the location.



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General guidelines for clubs—key considerations

Sporting clubs owe a “duty of care” to their members to provide a safe and healthy environment. When drug use comes to the attention of a club, the club should consider the welfare of the individual/s involved as a priority. Ignoring the problem in the hope it will go away is no solution. Below are some things to consider when your club develops its approach to illegal drugs.

Planning

Before any incident occurs it is best that the club determines how it will respond if a member is discovered using or supplying illegal drugs. A good starting point is to make it clear to all members that the possession, use and/or supply of illegal drugs is not acceptable. It is also important that everybody knows what to do if they have a concern about illegal drug use in the club and that they know any such concerns will be handled with discretion.

The club could contact the local community health service to find out what drug and alcohol services are available in your area and what support they can provide to the club and/or anyone concerned with their own, or someone else’s drug use.

Provide a safe, supportive and inclusive club environment

A safe and supportive club culture protects people against a range of health-related risks, including the use of alcohol and other drugs. An inclusive club culture provides a place where players, members, supporters, families and others in the community can connect and engage in meaningful and positive relationships.

Expect your club “leaders” to be good role models

People are exposed to legal drugs (alcohol and tobacco) from an early age. There are many people within the club (coach, committee, senior players) who are important role models for other club members, particularly young people. Members of the club may not be inclined to listen if those who tell them drug use is wrong are misusing legal drugs themselves.

The club also sends “messages” to players and members in the way it manages legal drugs such as alcohol. For example, conducting ‘all-you-can-drink’ functions, using a wheelbarrow load of beer or spirits as a raffle prize, or providing unlimited drinks at the bar for the best-on-the-ground player sends a poor message to club members and supporters about responsible drinking.

Manage alcohol responsibly

Although a legal drug, alcohol causes significantly more harm in the community than all illegal drugs. Often people will use alcohol in conjunction with other illegal drugs and the combined effect can be dangerous and unpredictable.

How your club manages alcohol sends a message about drug use to members. Promoting and implementing a responsible approach to alcohol consumption will help to restrict the risks the club faces from other illegal drug use. Joining the Good Sports program (www.goodsports.com.au) will assist your club to improve its alcohol management.



Club confidants

Nominate an appropriate person within the club to take responsibility for the management of any drug-related incidents (this may, but does not have to, be the Club President or another office bearer). This “club confidant” should be highly regarded within the club and someone who people trust and feel comfortable talking to. The confidant does not have to be especially knowledgeable about illegal drugs but should know how to deal with the issue if it arises. Being able to maintain confidentiality (providing information on a need to know basis) is a prerequisite for any confidant.

Information sessions

The club committee should consider holding an information session for players, coaches, members and parents about illegal drugs. This would provide an opportunity to discuss the issue at club level and outline the club position.

These sessions should be conducted by people with significant experience in the alcohol and other drug field. Ideally the presenter should approach the issue from the perspective of ensuring the welfare, health and safety of all players and club members.

Information sessions should go beyond simply explaining the various drugs and their effects and include the following information:

- club position on people using/supplying drugs
- club “duty of care”
- who to speak to at the club if a member has any concerns
- what sort of help is available if someone in the club needs to know more
- where to go for help.

The manual *Communities Offering Drug Education (CODE)* outlines information that could be presented in these sessions and is available for purchase from the Australian Drug Foundation (ADF, www.adf.org.au or call 1300 85 85 84).

Be prepared for a medical emergency

Any sporting club must be ready to respond to a medical emergency that may occur on the playing field or in the club environment. A drug-related medical emergency is no different. Even if the cause of the emergency is the use of an illegal drug, the medical needs take precedence.

The club should ensure that:

- relevant personnel have current first aid training
- first aid trained personnel are present at all club activities
- first aid supplies are comprehensive and maintained appropriately
- key contact numbers (e.g. ambulance, local medical centre) are accessible and phones are available.

Managing the media

Illegal drugs are a very popular media issue. Incidents involving illegal drugs are often presented in a sensationalist manner and this could have significant negative repercussions on a club.



Your club should ensure there is a single spokesperson on this issue if required and determine the circumstances under which the club may take proactive media action. It is recommended that the club speaks to their league/association for assistance before dealing with the media.

Develop a policy

When the club has determined how it will deal with a drug issue and the level of support it will provide to club members who are discovered using/supplying illegal drugs, it is recommended this be developed into a policy and provided to all members. This should be done through consultation and input from club members and the league/association. Any policy should be approved by the club's committee / board.

Information about drugs

Defining drugs

The drugs of most concern to the community are psychoactive drugs that affect the central nervous system and can change the way a person thinks, feels or behaves. Apart from the physiological damage that can occur from drug use, drugs also increase the chance of someone engaging in dangerous behaviours and putting themselves and/or others at risk of injury (or death).

Some psychoactive drugs are **legal** (e.g. alcohol, nicotine, caffeine), while others are **illegal** (e.g. cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, methamphetamines). While illegal drugs tend to get most attention in the media, it should be noted that the legal drugs (alcohol, nicotine) cause the most harms in our community due to their widespread use and misuse.

Why people use drugs

Most people use drugs because they want to feel better or change their mood. They use drugs for the perceived or experienced benefits, often without thinking of the potential harm.

People use drugs to relax, have fun, to be part of a group, out of curiosity and to escape from physical or psychological pain. Social pressure is another reason some people take drugs. Drug use is often associated with a range of other problems in a person's life.

Some people use a drug once or twice out of curiosity while others continue to use them more often. Dependence on a drug occurs when a person takes it to feel normal or avoid withdrawal symptoms. This can occur following regular use over time. Young people, like older people, are more likely to use legal drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and painkillers than illegal drugs.

Drugs and their effects

The effect a drug has on a person varies depending on:

- the type, how much and how often the drug is taken
- previous use
- how the drug is taken (e.g. injected, swallowed)
- physical characteristics of the person taking the drug
- mood of the person and environment the drug is taken in



- whether other drugs are used.

Drugs can be categorised by the effect they have on the central nervous system. There are three broad categories of drugs: depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens

Depressants

Slows down the central nervous system affecting coordination, concentration and judgement. They can cause a person to feel relaxed and less inhibited (e.g. alcohol, cannabis).

Stimulants

Stimulates the central nervous system, speeding up messages to and from the brain. They can make a person feel more awake, alert or confident (e.g. caffeine, nicotine, amphetamines, ecstasy).

Hallucinogens

Distort a person's sense of reality. People who have taken them may see or hear things that aren't really there or what they see may be distorted in some way. This can cause people to panic and lose sense of reality (e.g. LSD, magic mushrooms). Cannabis and ecstasy can also have hallucinogenic qualities.

Problems caused by drugs

This is difficult to define. Most experts agree that a drug problem is measured by how the drug affects the person's life and the lives of those around them, as opposed to how much or what drugs a person uses. All psychoactive drugs (both legal and illegal) can become a problem.

Some of the problems that can occur as a result of drug use include:

- family/relationship problems
- work/school problems
- accidents
- legal problems
- financial
- health
- sexual.

Determining if someone is using drugs

It can be difficult to know for sure if someone is using drugs. There are no specific physical signs or personality changes that indicate with certainty that someone is using them and the effects of drug use vary greatly from person to person. However, some of the following signs **may** indicate a problem and the club has a duty of care to follow this up with the individual concerned:

- person acting strangely or out of character
- person frequently missing training/games
- someone not operating at their "normal" standard
- tiredness and lack of concentration.

While some illegal drugs used for social purposes may be used to enhance sporting performance (e.g. amphetamines), most drugs will have a detrimental affect on the individual's ability to perform



at their best. If used before or during sports participation, some drugs may put the individual at risk of harm.

Drug laws

Each Australian state and territory has laws governing the manufacture, possession, distribution and use of drugs, both legal and illegal. Drugs laws distinguish between those who use drugs and those who supply (or traffic) drugs.

The main types of offences related to illegal drugs are:

- use
- possession
- cultivation
- trafficking.

Penalties can include fines and/or imprisonment, depending on the offence and any prior convictions. Generally for a first offence for use or possession of a drug, police will direct the person to rehabilitation instead of facing the courts.

Questions and answers

1. What factors should a club take into account when responding to issues involving illegal drugs?

The first thing for the responsible club members (e.g. president, club confidant) to do is to assess the situation as calmly as possible. The following factors will be relevant to that assessment:

- whether there any immediate medical risks to any person
- whether the matter involves use or supply
- whether the use or supply takes place within the club jurisdiction, or in private
- age of persons involved
- privacy issues
- legal obligations.

2. What should the club do if someone is using drugs at the club or at a club function?

When a club learns that a member is using a drug at the club it has a responsibility to act to protect the welfare of that person and all other members of the club. The club should:

- a. remind them of the club policy and ask for a commitment that it will not happen again
- b. offer options for support and referral for counselling or other help
- c. the person should be sanctioned in line with the club policy (see examples below)
- d. leave the door open for further communication with the person concerned.

Sanctions

Options for sanctioning a member depend on the rules of the club. Sanctions regularly imposed for a breach of club rules include (i) warnings, (ii) suspension and ultimately (iii) loss of membership (expulsion). Some clubs have a graduated three step process such as:



- First time—warning and reminder of club policy/position on drug use
- Second time—suspension for a designated time
- Third time—expulsion.

Attending counselling may be a condition for the person to continue their involvement at the club.

While expelling the individual from the club may be the simplest response, it may not be in the best interests of the person. However, in the case of supply of drugs in particular, the club also has to consider the welfare of other members.

3. What should the club do if a person is under the influence of an illegal drug at the club?

If a person's behaviour appears unusual or causes concern, regardless of the reason, the club has a responsibility to ensure they receive appropriate attention, and do not come to harm, or cause harm to others. It may not be possible to know at the time whether the person is affected by alcohol or illegal drugs (or both), or is unwell due to another reason.

The suggested approach to follow is:

- Ensure the safety of the person.
- Keep the person under supervision and monitor them at regular intervals.
- Call medical assistance if required.
- Arrange safe transport to take them home, unless that would involve further risk.
- Take control of any remaining drugs in their possession. See Question 6 for further action.
- If the person becomes violent or aggressive, contact police to ensure the safety of all.
- Inform the Club President (and designated club confidant) as soon as possible.

Follow up: If the person is a member of the club, the club should follow the procedure in Question 2 at a suitable time.

4. What should the club do if it believes someone is using drugs at the club but is not sure?

If a member believes that someone is using drugs at the club they should inform the Club President and/or Club confidant.

- Either the President or club confidant should speak to the individual in private to express concern that the person is believed to have used a drug.
- Ask if the belief is accurate.
- If the person agrees they are using drugs at the club:
 - a. remind them of the club policy and ask for a commitment that it will not happen again
 - b. offer options for support and where they can get help
 - c. the person should be sanctioned in line with the club policy
 - d. leave the door open for further communication should the person wish to talk.
- If the person denies they are using drugs, ask if there are any other issues that they wish to talk about. If the person is annoyed that they have been accused, point out that the club has a duty to take the matter seriously, that it regrets any embarrassment, and that it is handling the matter with discretion.



Note: Club members should be aware of the danger of making a false accusation and such an accusation must be handled with the utmost discretion.

5. Are there any privacy issues to consider?

- Where possible privacy should be maintained for those involved. While absolute confidentiality may not be guaranteed in all cases, the club should act discreetly. Only club personnel who need to know should be informed.
- You should be guided by the privacy policy and other related documents of your club and the sport's governing body.

6. What should the club do with an amount of an illegal drug found at the club (or in possession of a person at the club)?

If a member discovers an amount of a substance they suspect to be an illegal drug at the club or in possession of a person at the club, they should inform the Club President and/or Club confidant as soon as possible. The Club should;

- Take possession of the drug.
- Place the drug in a clean (preferably “snap lock”) plastic bag.
- Seal the plastic bag with masking tape to ensure it stays closed.
- The finder and/or club president should sign and date the tape/bag.
- Details should be written in an incident register.
- Contact local police and request they attend the club to collect the drugs.
- The plastic bag should be stored in a secure place until collected by police.
- Attending police should sign the incident register to show the drugs have been taken into their possession.
- If a person suspected to be in possession of illegal drugs will not give them to the club, they should be asked to leave the premises immediately (assuming it is safe to do so).

7. How should the club respond if they hear that a person is using illegal drugs in private?

- If the drug use is taking place in private, it is not under the jurisdiction of the club (unless the person arrives at the club affected by a drug. See Question 3).
- The club has no duty of care or legal obligation to act on this matter.
- However, depending on the circumstances, the club may choose to:
 - a. Speak to the person privately
 - b. Express concern for the person's wellbeing
 - c. Ask whether the matter is true.
 - d. If the person is aged under 18 years it is advisable the clubs notifies their parent(s) or guardian of the suspected use (assuming this will not put the person at greater risk). The club may choose to inform parent(s) or guardian when the individual is aged over 18 years. (See Question 8).
 - e. Remind the individual of the club policy.
 - f. Offer assistance to find suitable counselling if appropriate.



8. Should the club tell the parents that their child is using illegal drugs? Does this vary depending on the individual's age? Is there a legal requirement to do so?

- If the player/member is aged under 18 years and the club is aware (or strongly believes) they are using illegal drugs (either at or away from the club), it is advisable to notify the parent or guardian.
- An exception to this may occur if the club believes that to inform the parents/guardians would place the individual at risk of greater harm.
- All player/members aged under 18 years should be informed through the club's drug policy or code of conduct that parents will be informed if the club is aware (or strongly believes) that someone is using illegal drugs.
- If the member is aged over 18 years, they are considered an adult by law and the club is under no obligation to inform parents. However, the club should determine each case on its merits and decide what is in the best interests of the individual.

9. Must the club inform police if they become aware that someone at the club is using illegal drugs? Does this vary depending on the person's age? Is there a legal requirement to do so?

- There is no legal requirement to contact police if someone is known to be using drugs, regardless of the person's age.
- The club's priority should be to ensure the safety and welfare of the person using drugs. This may require seeking medical attention or referring them to a treatment service (e.g. counselling; see Question 15).

10. Should the club react differently if a member is supplying drugs to others as compared to using drugs themselves?

- As supplying drugs can have serious consequences for the recipient's health and welfare, it is generally considered a more serious issue by the law and consequently carries harsher penalties.
- Supplying drugs creates a risk that other club members will be exposed to and have the opportunity to access illegal drugs.
- The designated confidant within your club should speak to any person who is suspected of supplying drugs to ascertain if that is happening.
- If this is verified, or there is a strong belief this is occurring, the club should contact Crime Stoppers on 1300 333 000. Anonymity may be maintained.
- If it is unable to be verified, the club should monitor the situation and warn the individual that the matter will be reported to Crime Stoppers if the club has continued concerns.
- This issue and how the club will respond should be clearly stated in the club's drug policy



11. What if there is no-one in the club who feels comfortable to talk to the person believed to be using/supplying drugs?

- Someone in your club should act as a designated club confidant to take responsibility for the management of illegal drug issues.
- If this person is uncertain about how to deal with specific incidents or issues contact DirectLine for advice (see Question 15).
- The approach taken with the person who is using drugs is important. Try to discover the truth but be careful not to make false accusations. Express concern for the individual's health and welfare.
- Suggesting that the person speak to a counsellor (either in person or on the phone) is a positive step.

12. Should the club allow the person who is using/supplying drugs to continue their involvement in the club?

The club should decide on the process for dealing with a drug incident. The response may vary depending on whether the person was using a drug compared to supplying others with a drug and depending on the rules of the club and the policy it has in place.

Sanctions

Options for sanctioning a member depend on the rules of the Club. Sanctions regularly imposed for a breach of club rules include (i) warnings, (ii) suspension and ultimately (iii) loss of membership (expulsion). Some clubs have a graduated three step process such as:

- First time—warning and reminder of club policy/position on drug use
- Second time—suspension for a designated time
- Third time—expulsion.

Attending counselling may be a condition for the person to continue their involvement at the club.

While expelling the individual from the club may be the simplest response, it may not be in the best interests of the person. However, in the case of supply of drug in particular, the club also has to consider the welfare of other members.

13. Where can we get further information about drugs?

The ADF's DrugInfo Clearinghouse can provide you with more information about drugs and their effects:

- Web: www.druginfo.adf.org.au
- Email: druginfo@adf.org.au
- Tel.: 1300 858584.

14. Where can we get assistance to develop a club policy on illegal drugs?

Australian Drug Foundation

Tel.: (03) 9278 8100

The ADF has a wealth of experience working with community sporting clubs on alcohol management and can assist your club develop a policy on illegal drugs.



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15. Where can we get support and advice about illegal drugs?

DirectLine

Tel.: 1800 888 236

This is a good first point of call for help, unless it is for a **medical emergency (in which case stay calm and call 000)**. DirectLine is a free 24/7 phone service that is available statewide. It will provide counselling and advice for anyone with a drug problem or for those wanting to support someone who has. If the situation requires, they will organise referral to more comprehensive and intensive support or treatment services. It is a confidential service.

Counselling online

Web: www.counsellingonline.org.au

This free 24/7 online service provides professional counselling about alcohol and drug-related issues. It is for anyone seeking help with their own drug use or the drug use of a family member or friend. This service is suitable for those that feel more comfortable discussing the issue online rather than over the telephone.

Community health service/centre

Contact your local community health service/centre. They often employ alcohol and other drug workers who provide a variety of services including information provision and treatment (e.g. counselling). If they do not have an alcohol and other drug worker, they should be able to refer you to another service (or call DirectLine 1800 888 236). You can find your local community health service/centre in the phone book (see “Community Health Centres & Services” in the *Yellow Pages*) or from your general practitioner. Some of these services may charge a small fee.

Family Drug Help

Tel.: 1300 660 068

Family Drug Help (FDH) provides support and information to parents and other family members of someone with problematic alcohol or other drug use. They help families understand how they can achieve positive outcomes for a family member who is using drugs.

If and when clubs inform the family of their child’s drug use, they could be referred to FDH for support.

DrugInfo Clearinghouse

Web: www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Tel.: 1300 85 85 84

The DrugInfo Clearinghouse provides easy access to information about alcohol and other drugs through its website, library, membership service and bookshop. A range of publications and printed information is available.



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Additional information

Resources

The following resources are available for purchase from the ADF bookshop.

- **‘How drugs affect you’ series**
These fifteen pamphlets provide basic information about legal and illegal drugs including effects on the body, legality and risks of use. Topics include: alcohol, amphetamines, analgesics (painkillers), benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, drugs and their effects, ecstasy, gammahydroxybutyrate (GHB), hallucinogens, heroin, ice, inhalants, ketamine and tobacco.
- ***Alcohol and other drug treatment pamphlet***
An easy overview of treatment for alcohol and other drug problems. Explains the aims of treatment, terminology and how/when a person would receive treatment.
- ***What drug is that? Brochure***
A handy brochure covering 12 legal and illegal drugs. Includes photos and information about what the drug is, how it is used, short and long-term effects of use, risks and lethality.
- ***What drug is that? Poster***
Complete overview of 12 legal and illegal drugs in poster form. Includes photos, and information about what the drug is, how it is used, short and long-term effects of use, risks and lethality.
- ***What drug is that? DVD***
Thirty minute DVD program aimed at young people. Explains most legal and illegal drugs and risks of use. Includes interviews with experts.
- ***Communities offering drug education manual***
This manual is a practical guide on how to host sessions about alcohol and other drugs if you are not trained in drug education. It contains information and statistics about drug use, “ready-to-go” slides and discussion notes linked to National Drug Strategy. Also includes *What drug is that?* brochure and poster.

All these resources and many more can be ordered from the ADF bookshop at www.bookshop.adf.org.au, or call 1300 85 85 84 for more information.

Website

- www.somazone.com.au
Specifically for young people, this website provides an anonymous question and answer service about drugs, sex, relationships, mental health, abuse and other issues.

Fact sheets

The fact sheets listed below are available free of charge from the ADF’s DrugInfo Clearinghouse. You can obtain printed copies by contacting the DrugInfo Clearinghouse on 1300 85 85 84 or download copies from the website www.druginfo.adf.org.au.



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- Good Sports Program
- Why it's dumb to drink when you're a teenager
- Teenagers and alcohol: a quick guide for parents
- How alcohol affects teenagers
- The facts about binge drinking
- Cannabis use and mental health: the facts.

Disclaimer

Information contained in this document is offered for general purposes and should not be considered a substitute for specific, professional advice. No responsibility can be accepted by the Australian Drug Foundation for loss occasioned to any person doing anything as a result of any material in this publication.



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