Policing Drugs in the Third Millennium: The Dilemmas of Community-based Philosophies*

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Introduction

Visible illicit drug use, drug dealing and drug-related crime have become prominent anxieties in many late twentieth century residential and commercial neighbourhoods: neighbourhoods which have also been seen as exemplifying the opportunities for the application of techniques of community policing. The rhetoric, practices and dilemmas of community-based policing occupy a central place in contemporary policing discourse. To date, that discourse has been concerned largely with the capacity and willingness of police bureaucracies to transform themselves in ways which will allow more effective partnerships at the local level to solve crime and disorder problems. This has been a legitimate concern, given the abundant evidence that police organisations are unwilling and slow to transform traditional policies and practices, no matter how deficient those policies and practices are demonstrated to be.

However, our concern in this paper moves beyond the need for structural accommodations within policing organisations, and towards an analysis of shifts in the nature of 'community' in a post-modern world. Our contention is that even if police organisations do make the necessary adjustments, communities themselves are undergoing particular kinds of socio-economic changes which will crucially influence the nature of and demand for police services. In essence, we argue that community policing debates have largely ignored these wider socio-economic developments, with the consequence that the potential dynamics of community policing have been insufficiently theorised. Unless these issues are addressed, the future of community policing may well be uncertain.

To illustrate our arguments, the paper concentrates on community-based approaches to drug law enforcement. It begins by summarising the contemporary discourse on community policing, then identifies rationales for applying such policing to community drug issues and problems. It concludes by identifying major problems inherent in such application.

The conventional analysis of community policing

The origins, rationales, practices and problems of community policing have been well canvassed, and we need only summarise the central points here (Moore 1992; Sarre 1996). The term 'community policing ' is notoriously fluid, capable of multiple meanings and manifestations; it can be a coherent organising philosophy, a set of more or less disparate practices, a disingenuous label or claim. We prefer to conceive of community policing as an idealised model with particular constituent elements, against which specific policies and programs can be assessed. But before that model is described, it is useful to sketch in the conventional history of modern community policing.

Kelling and Moore (1988) have supplied an account for the North American context which has sufficient resonance with Australian conditions to be worth summarising here. For these scholars, US policing can be divided broadly into three eras: the political; the reform; and the community problem-solving. While the political era has features unique to US policing (the highly specific influence of local politicians over policing policies and practices), each of the eras arguably has analogues in countries such as the UK and Australia. The political era (from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century) was characterised by a broad conflict-management mandate, in which police goals were distributed widely across crime prevention, order maintenance, criminal investigation and social service provision. Organisational forms were decentralised, with considerable local autonomy, and direct political intervention into policing was routine. The era declined under two pressures: scandals associated with political corruption, and a perceived need for police agencies to adopt modernist 'scientific' forms of organisation and practice.

Out of the decline emerged the reform era (from the 1930s to the 1970s), which was dominated by a narrowing mandate concerned more exclusively with crime fighting and law enforcement, and increasing centralisation and professionalisation. In an occupational climate of increasing expert division of labour, police assumed the mantle of professional crime fighters to give their work the kinds of legitimacy it had lacked under the political era. As a consequence, they shed or attenuated the more diffuse elements of their mandate — the social services, the conflict-management roles — in favour of law enforcement.

From the 1960s onwards, the reform era faced significant challenges. First, the willing embrace of technologies in the areas of communications, criminal investigation techniques, mobility, equipment, weaponry, etc did not have the anticipated returns in terms of either reductions in crime rates or citizen satisfaction. Indeed, recorded crime rates escalated alarmingly. Second, the legitimacy police craved as expert crime fighters was denied them by ongoing scandals about corruption and brutality, and by their manifest inability to deal effectively (and fairly) with the major social dissent movements of the 1960s and 1970s — the anti-war and anti-segregation campaigns, recreational drug use — and with urban unrest in the big cities.

A key conclusion about the dilemmas faced by the late reform era was that policing had neglected its most valuable resource — the community — in its haste to claim expertise and hegemony in crime fighting. This neglect had several consequences. Research demonstrated that the most single pertinent factor in a successful criminal investigation was information supplied by victims or witnesses, and without citizen cooperation, efficient responses to criminal incidents were on their own unlikely to be sufficient. In addition, citizens in fact demanded a wider service from police than effective incident response: they wanted crime prevented in the first place; they wanted their fears of crime and disorder dealt with and allayed; and they wanted police to listen to their concerns.

At least two influential policy positions emerged in the US from the critiques of reform era policing. The first, articulated by Herman Goldstein (1979), was the need for police to re-orient themselves towards solving the problems associated with crime, rather than reacting to the incidents of crime. The second and related position, developed by James Q Wilson and George Kelling (1981, 1989), was the need for police to take seriously neighbourhood disorder, as such disorder (in even trivial form) fosters the conditions in which predatory crime can flourish. Both of the positions demand involvement by communities in the formulation and execution of appropriate policing practices.

The developments above have their analogies in British and Australian policing, although of course forms and conditions vary significantly. Scarman's (1982) report into the Brixton disorders was, amongst others, seminal in generating community-based policing approaches in the UK, while Australian policing experimented with community initiatives from the early 1980s (Beyer 1992; McKillop and Vernon 1991).

For Kelling and Moore, western English-speaking policing is now located in the third of their historical eras of policing, the community problem-solving era. Despite their categorisation, it would be misleading, we believe, to characterise contemporary policing as essentially community-based. As we note below, the credentials for a comprehensive community policing approach are very demanding, and few if any police organisations could claim to have acquired them all. In addition, if the term 'community-based policing era' is taken to mean that more traditional forms of policing have been abandoned, then this too would be misleading. Many aspects of the reform era's agenda remain firmly in place: the acquisition of technology; the search for professional status and hegemony; organisational performance conceptions based upon criminal investigation success, and so forth. As well, police organisations have continued to develop paramilitary capacities which sit quite obliquely to the rhetoric and practices of community policing. We do not here argue against these developments (although there are aspects of them which are clearly worrying). Rather, we are concerned more with the fate of community policing within its own frames of reference.

Conventional analyses of community policing concentrate largely on the capacities of police organisations to manage the changes necessary for its execution. Problems that have been identified include cultural resistance within policing, inadequate training and support, inadequate organisational structures, questions over effectiveness, ambiguities in meanings and mandates, inappropriate police dominance of community mechanisms, and difficulties in generating intersectoral partnerships (Beyer 1992; James and Sutton 1993; McIntyre and Prenzler 1997; Moore 1992; Sarre 1996).

Analyses framed by these problems are valuable, because they reflect real dilemmas within policing posed by the kinds of paradigm shift represented by comprehensive community policing. But the sharpness of those dilemmas within policing should not obscure the many formidable obstacles which confront community policing from without. In particular, we find that 'community' itself is neglected as a concept and as a set of complex relationships. While most community policing commentaries note that communities are 'diverse', they generally fail to move beyond the trite (for an exception, see Hogg and Findlay 1988). In the final section of this paper, we specify the implications of this diversity, in particular in relation to emerging socio-economic trends. But here we need first to detail our community policing model, and then to present our arguments for the application of community-based models to the illicit drugs arena.

We take comprehensive community policing to require three crucial constituents from the police perspective: a specific mandate or philosophy; a related organisational structure;

and a set of appropriate discretionary practices arising out of partnership processes between police and community. The mandate requires that police address the problems which generate, and are generated by, crime and disorder within communities, rather than merely reacting to crime and disorder incidents. The organisational structure requires that police be trained, deployed, encouraged and rewarded for pursuing the community policing mandate. The practices require that police design and execute policies and programs in conjunction with community members in reciprocal relationships characterised by mutual respect, problem identification, information-sharing and practice evaluation. Such practices require the acknowledgment of discretionary options, the exercise of accountable discretionary decisions, and organisational support for those decisions.

These are patently demanding elements, and their full conjunction across an entire police organisation is not, to our knowledge, anywhere apparent. More usually, one or two of them (rarely all three) may be reflected in particular units, specialisations or geographical sites within a police organisation. As an idealised model, we would not condemn any particular community policing approach for failing to include and integrate each of the constituents. Nevertheless, we would assess approaches according to how closely they matched the demands of the overall model.

The need for community-based drug law enforcement

Australian drug law enforcement policy is guided by the principle of harm minimisation enunciated in the National Drug Strategy (1993). Harm minimisation essentially means a recognition that illicit drug use is largely ineradicable, and sensible public policy should be directed at moderating the harms generated by such use through a range of control, education and treatment services, rather than adopting the 'zero tolerance' stance of United States drug policy (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1989; Single and Rohl 1997). Law enforcement agencies throughout the country are committed formally to the National Drug Strategy, but there has been a history of law enforcement misunderstanding of the implications of harm minimisation for their own operational practices. Many police organisations perceive their roles in harm minimisation primarily in terms of reducing availability of illicit drugs by interdicting supply and manufacture, and locking up traffickers. The harms to individual drug users have been considered by police to be the responsibility of services and agencies outside law enforcement — in particular welfare, medical and educational agencies.

The present writers recently reviewed Australian drug law enforcement on behalf of the National Police Research Unit, and we concluded that the role of law enforcement needed to be much broader than that of supply-reduction if policing was to give effect to the National Drug Strategy policy of drug harm minimisation (Sutton and James 1996). It was our contention that despite the formal endorsement of the harm minimisation policy by all State and Territory police services, police were pursuing drug law enforcement with little knowledge or understanding of the impact of their activities upon illicit drug markets. One concern was that the capacity of law enforcement to reduce the supply of illicit drugs imported into or manufactured or grown within the country was considerably overstated. On the evidence of many law enforcement personnel themselves, supply reduction was an enormously difficult and ultimately futile endeavour.

As well, we were concerned that police were not able to assess the extent to which their drug law enforcement might be iatrogenic, in the sense that some aspects of their activities may exacerbate harm rather than to alleviate it. By viewing harm minimisation as an enforcement responsibility only so far as it related to supply reduction, police were neglecting

the part they played in reshaping drug markets and drug consumption patterns in ways that were harmful. For instance, saturation policing of user locations and surveillance of needle and syringe exchanges arguably exacerbate the problems of needle-sharing, unhygienic drug administration and unsafe needle disposal. And despite National Drug Strategy injunctions for law enforcement to concentrate upon drug suppliers and leave users to the health and welfare services, Australian arrest figures for drug offences consistently demonstrate that the overwhelming bulk of such arrests are for use and possession offences, and of these user offences, most are for cannabis (Sutton and James 1996; Green and Purnell 1996).

Consequently, we recommended the adoption of a range of strategies which would bring harm minimisation to the forefront of operational policing within the community. On the assumption that dramatic legislative change to current prohibitionist drug policies were unlikely (an assumption which has been borne out by Federal Cabinet's recent rejection of the ACT's proposed heroin trial — see *The Age* 20/8/97), we argued that law enforcement needed to take advantage of the considerable discretionary latitude it already possessed (Sutton and James 1996; James and Sutton 1996). At the same time, police are formally committed (if often only in rhetorical terms) to community problem-solving in matters of crime and crime-related harm, and illicit drug markets fall squarely within this domain. Drug harm minimisation is therefore a germane component of this proactive policing mandate. In particular, harm minimisation requires all relevant agencies to gather and pool information, to work cooperatively, to jointly identify problems, to jointly arrive at solutions. It is a true intersectoral activity, and it offers the major opportunity for law enforcement to obtain and use the information about drug markets and consequent drug-related harms that it needs to measure the impact of its activities, and to minimise adverse consequences.[1]

However, since the drug law enforcement evaluation, we have come to the conclusion that it is considerably easier to recommend the adoption of community-based strategies than it is to implement them. In part, this conclusion is based upon subsequent work we have conducted with drug law enforcement agencies, which has revealed to us the difficulties of transforming traditional police structures and practices to accommodate community-based approaches (see Brown and Sutton 1997). In part also, the conclusion has been reached by further reflection on the construction of 'community'. We turn now to an examination of some of the problems — internal and external — that we have identified in community-based drug law enforcement.

Problems internal to community-based drug law enforcement

Law enforcement initiatives which lie outside the domain of traditional reactive criminal investigation and order maintenance tasks, and especially those which require proactive work in the community and through intersectoral partnerships, typically face resistance from peer and management cultures within policing. Grafted onto this generalised scepticism or contempt for 'unorthodox' approaches is the difficulty many police have with integrating harm minimisation into their traditional law enforcement roles in the drug-using and drug-moving environments. This is a problem particularly for criminal investigators. One of us attempted recently to propagate the harm minimisation message to a boisterous group of State drug squad trainees, and was greeted with: "So you want us to start hugging junkies now!"

There are at least two significant problems here. First, cultural stereotyping and enforce-ment experience has taught many police to despise drug users, especially dependent, 'hopeless' users, who are seen as complicit in the criminal forces of the drug market. In par-ticular, their personal degradation is complemented by their alleged involvement in property crime to support their dependencies. This is not the clientele that traditional police chose to be 'lenient' towards: hence the surveillance and harassment of the user population, and the resulting high charge rate for use and possession. Use and possession charges rep-resent in many circumstances the modern equivalent of the old public order maintenance statutes such as drunk and disorderly which for many decades were used for dealing with problematic street populations.

Second, even for those police who recognise the need for some alternatives to 'street cleaning' approaches to use, possession and minor street dealing, the discretionary environ-ment can be complex. While prohibition remains on the books, police may well continue to feel vulnerable when they choose not to enforce laws against even minor drug offences. Po-lice of course have always been expected to exercise discretion, but it is difficult to develop appropriate accountability structures and clearly specify all the conditions where discretion is legitimate and preferable. Younger and more inexperienced police in particular may fall back on strict law enforcement simply to 'cover themselves' in the face of possible criticism.

Solutions to these problems are clearly not simple. The trivialisation and marginalisation of non-traditional policing endeavours is a chronic problem, but they can be eroded through the provision of adequate status and rewards within the organisation for personnel who chose to engage and excel in these endeavours. Traditional indicators of police performance — arrests, seizures etc — have always been poor measures in our view, but they are embed-ded into police culture and police organisational structures. The challenge here is to come up with new and innovative ways to measure effectiveness, and to base realistic and impres-sive organisational rewards upon those measures.

Negative cultural stereotyping of and experiences with the drug using population also are stubborn obstacles to re-orienting practice towards harm minimisation. The full practice of community-based harm minimisation offers the best chance to overcome them. By engag-ing with non-enforcement agencies and personnel (needle exchanges, treatment centres, user groups, educational personnel and so forth), police can balance their selective law en-forcement experiences and data with other perspectives, information and worlds.   The discretionary dilemmas are subject to the same kinds of moderation. Discretion is best de-fended when its reasons can be articulated and its outcomes are both measurable and accountable. In the harm minimisation area, all this is achievable. The harm minimisation approach is coherent and organisationally approved, and with the kinds of knowledge and expertise gained by those working within its practices, the benefits of exercising discretion in certain ways can be propagated.

One should not be naive about the difficulties of 'mainstreaming' harm minimisation ap-proaches within policing; it will be a long haul. The very considerable structural difficulties that confront police departments in efforts to shift from traditional reactive models of po-licing are intimidating, and one of us has written specifically on this topic recently (Brown and Sutton 1997). Nevertheless, the organisational diffusion process of having well-rewarded, experienced, authoritative and management-endorsed harm minimisers within police ranks is both necessary and, we believe, possible in a way that was inconceivable a decade ago. But before we get too optimistic, we need to note that even successful mainstreaming within policing will not overcome all of the obstacles confronting the progressive engagement of law enforcement in community drug harm minimisation.

Problems external to community-based drug law enforcement

The harm minimisation approach within law enforcement is a logical part of community policing. It requires working with the community and the array of non-police agencies which deal with drug use; it means understanding community problems and concerns, and working out joint solutions; it means, at its most complete level, law enforcement putting itself in the hands of the community in terms of its needs and demands. This kind of rhetorical description of community policing has dominated policing discourse for 20 years. But its familiarity and its logic should not blind us to the problems that underpin any community-based approach. One of the crucial problems associated with police trying to move away from hierarchical, bureaucratic models towards locally based partnerships is that they have tended to take the notion of 'community' for granted.

Reviewing some of the community-based policing literature put out both by police departments and by external proponents of such policing, we are struck by a typical assumption: that there is a law-abiding majority 'out there' waiting to embrace law enforcers if and when they snap out of their absorption with internal procedures and routines, and ready to work with them to produce the social order which best conforms with local values and priorities.

This assumption has always been more of a convenient fiction than reality. The experiences of police in practice reveal intense divisions within the community along lines of class, age, gender, race, ethnicity and so forth. These divisions demand different kinds of policing, and it was at least in part due to the political expressions of these demands that police in the US began to retreat from intimate community contact during the 'reform' era (Kelling and Moore 1988). The connections between intimate community contact (or contact with particular sections of the community) and police corruption were obvious then, as they remain today. Close engagement with certain kinds of community interests and values have a high corruption potential for police. The paradox is that such engagement fulfils at least some of the criteria for community policing: an intimate knowledge of and preparedness to work with 'relevant local interests'. In our national drug law enforcement study, we interviewed one police officer who was, on a later admission before the Wood Royal Commission, thoroughly corrupt. Yet we were struck by the depth of his knowledge of the drug problems and issues in the locality he was policing. Compared with most of our other informants, this corrupt interviewee demonstrated a remarkable understanding of local patterns of illicit drug availability and use.

It is clear, then, that the notion of 'community' in community policing is problematic. However, law enforcement agencies continue to oversimplify the entity that they wish to police with: in the main, abstracted middle-class (or 'respectable' working-class) families and businesses. The advent since the 1960s of feminism, multiculturalism and other movements have forced some adaptations to this definition of community, but the assumption of a vast and implicitly supportive constituency with affiliation to 'core values' and mainstream institutions remains a key reference and anchor point for community policing.

We believe this assumption is unsustainable, and that its unsustainability is increasingly glaringly obvious as society undergoes substantial change within the evolving conditions of postmodern capitalism. If we are correct, this might mean that as Australia moves towards the third millennium, notions of community policing will become less and less achievable.

To understand our concern, it is necessary first to reflect upon what it was about the 1960s and 1970s that made notions of community (and community policing as a corollary) appear relatively unproblematic. In Australia, and a number of other western countries, this

was the height of the Keynsian era, where governments have key roles in 'steering' and sta-
bilising capitalist economies: promising near full employment, 'buying off' workers
through wage fixing systems, universal access to health, welfare and education. In many
ways it was these activities by governments which helped bring about those 'core values'
and majority investments in social stability which have been crucial assumptions of com-
munity policing.

However, as the 1980s and 1990s have progressed, we have seen increasing evidence
that high levels of state intervention in the economy and in the provision of social infrastruc-
ture simply cannot be sustained. As theorists such as Habermas (1976) and O'Connor
(1973) argue, reasons for the decline in state intervention are partly internal to the capitalist
state itself. Political demands in a democracy have meant that modern economies became
increasingly overloaded by the need to service education, health, welfare and of course law
and order; this servicing has resulted in the state scooping too much off the economy, and
as a consequence, over time, capital has declined to invest. Major commitments to ongoing
investment in physical and social infrastructure also has tended to deprive the modern state
of its capacity to be flexible: to lift expenditure (and hence boost demand) during times of
recession, and then to reduce it at times when the economy is buoyant.

In addition to these internal factors making it hard for governments to sustain the insti-
tutions essential for a (comparatively homogeneous) 'community', we also have seen
external pressures. Capital increasingly is more mobile and global; it no longer needs or de-
pends upon the government or labour force of Australia, or any other specific western state.
Business can, and does, shift elsewhere: to Indonesia, South America — wherever labour
is cheapest and government least burdensome.

All of these changes have quite profound effects. Zigmunt Bauman (1988) in fact argues
that as far as global capital is concerned, populations in many western countries are no long-
er needed for their labour power; they are only now needed as consumers. He suggests that
in time this will lead to a kind of bifurcation in modes of social control. On the one hand,
we will have affluent consumers who are 'seduced' into surrendering freedom. On the other
hand, we will have non-affluent (non-working, non-consuming) outsiders, who in effect can
only be 'repressed'.

It would be easy to dismiss Bauman as engaging in some sort of futurist fantasy if he
were to be alone in predicting these kinds of outcomes. But others are echoing his argu-
ments. In particular, Bill Jordan (1996) has written recently on the social implications of
economic rationalism. As in most western countries, governments in Australia have been
embarking for some years now on a program of successively decreasing government inter-
vention into the marketplace, and letting market forces determine the shape of social
outcomes. Whether the issue be education, housing, welfare, health, or employment pro-
grams, governments are encouraging communities to become more 'enterprising' and to
make their own choices. Such choices must be driven by rational self-interest and by the
economic resources available to them.

Faced with the need to make major decisions about these matters, many individuals,
groups and families are making what Jordan has called the decision to join a 'club' with oth-
ers who share similar values and expectations. This makes a considerable amount of self-
interested sense; by joining with others say in a local chamber of commerce, or a housing
estate, or a private school, one can share the infrastructure costs and the values of these in-
stitutions. But these clubs only work if their members can exclude those who cannot make
the necessary contributions, or who are going to be an unusually large drain upon resources,
or whose behaviour violates shared values. Jordan argues that as with other businesses,

associations formed through market choices have an innate tendency to both exclude 'prob-lem' people, and to deny responsibility for their well-being. In other words, people who miss out on our club memberships, because they cannot afford to join, or are unemployed, or are drug users, or are all of the above, are not our problem. It is not in our self-interest to let them join, and it is not in our interests to be responsible for them. Let someone else handle the problem.

Now this process of exclusion is somewhat different from other forms which are based upon moral grounds. That is, people are not necessarily excluded because we think they are morally delinquent or bad or mad. They are not tolerated in our clubs — our housing estates, our schools, our shopping centres — simply because they are not our business, and they don't contribute to our business. It needs hardly be said that the 'communities' generated by the processes underpinned by such economic rationalist philosophies are likely to be a far cry from the all-inclusive, consensus-based models that the 'community policing' liter-ature often seems to imply.

The central problem is that police have rarely found one homogeneous, consensual and united community 'out there'; they have found many communities with different values, experiences and expectations. These differences always have been hard to balance, and per-haps nowhere more so than in community-based drug control.

The essential issue as we see it is that such drug control demands tolerance, and tolerance is a commodity which is both unevenly distributed across communities, and which if the analysis above is correct, is likely to become even shorter in supply. As we define it, toler-ance does not mean liking, or enjoying, or rewarding. It does mean acceptance of certain social realities, such as the fact that illicit drug use exists, and will continue to exist despite prohibition. It means acceptance that some forms of drug use, and some means of drug con-sumption, such as sharing intravenous needles, are more dangerous than others. It means accepting that all drug users are not the same, and that there are no simple solutions to the harms that drug use may generate.

But this tolerance or acceptance is often at odds with community understandings of drug use. Australians have been encouraged for many decades to view the illicit drug user and the legal drug abuser as a deviant, and to view all illicit drug use and wider drug abuse as certainly physically dangerous and often morally wrong. We have been taught to exclude the drug user, particularly through law enforcement and the criminal justice system. It is no surprise then that some communities have difficulty in abandoning those perspectives. For them, harm minimisation means a reversal of all they have come to believe. The provision of needle exchanges, the provision of health and welfare services to users rather than the strict application of the criminal law, the tolerance of drug use that these approaches imply, all represent a retreat from 'normal' standards. It is not easy to persuade communities to abandon their long-held beliefs and to become tolerant.

Police engagement in harm minimisation will require that they attempt this persuasion; police are still considered authoritative and experienced within many community settings, and people are bound to be influenced by police endorsement of harm minimisation. But at the very time that a strategy has been crafted which calls for the toleration and inclusion of once-excluded people in order to stop them harming themselves and their communities, we can see the emergence of the new forms of social exclusion generated by post-modern society.

If this analysis is accurate, then the problems for community-based drug control are sig-nificant. Even if communities can be persuaded about the logic of harm minimisation, they

may well resist its practice, because they do not want it in their backyard. This we think is the most plausible explanation for much of the resistance to such harm minimisation strategies as needle exchanges, resistance which has been evident for instance recently in Cabramatta in Sydney and Footscray in Melbourne. In many such cases, the resistance is not necessarily based upon an outright hostility to the concept, but rather to the fact that the needle exchange is to be located here, and not there, in some other suburb or town centre. If the resistance was only due to conceptual ignorance or misunderstanding, then it can be dealt with. But when it is based upon self-interest, then it is based upon a sentiment that governments are increasingly urging on populations as a necessary and useful social force.

The dilemma for police engaged in community drug harm minimisation is how to deal with self-interest, or more particularly with competing self-interests. It is difficult not to be sympathetic to retailers suffering a drop in sales because of the reputation their shopping precinct has attracted for drug users, or members of a residential area sick of discarded syringes. Equally, we need to understand the need for users to have clean and cheap syringes and to be free of harassment so they take drugs in ways that reduce the harm as much as possible. So, the question becomes, to which expressions of community self-interest do police listen when it comes to implementing community-based drug control?

Clearly, some expressions of self-interest speak considerably louder than others, especially those with commercial arguments on their side. This is arguably the biggest challenge facing community-based drug control, and one which will most test the resolve and commitment of police organisations wanting to be involved in effective harm minimisation practices. In essence, it requires police to propose and argue a case for the common well-being of a whole community which quite simply subordinates the interests of local groups that traditionally support, and have in turn been supported by, law enforcement. Only when Australian law enforcement organisations consistently are arguing, winning and implementing such cases, will harm minimisation become a reality in policing. In all honesty, however, we are not over-confident about their capacity to do so.

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