

Ms Katy Gallagher, MLA  
Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra, ACT 2601

28 November 2011

Dear Chief Minister,

As the Patrons of Anex, we commend the ACT Government's leadership in the community debate about ways in which a controlled needle and syringe program in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) may begin.

As an initiative which rightly locates the challenge of controlling the transmission of blood borne viruses within prisons in a community health context, we strongly believe that your Government should now move forward with a plan for a sterile needle provision program at AMC.

The provision of a regulated needle and syringe program at AMC is consistent with your Government's obligation to ensure prison facilities are safe and secure for staff and those in custody.

Such a program should include adequate resourcing for orientation and training of the relevant health and corrections workforces.

National health policies endorse progression across all jurisdictions toward in-prison implementation of needle and syringe programs. We sincerely hope that your Government takes the principled decision that will see AMC as the location of the first achievement of this important public health measure in Australia.

As you are aware, the 2010 Australian National Drugs Strategy Household Survey indicates that more than 70 percent of ACT residents support needle and syringe programs generally. We therefore believe there is strong public understanding of the merits of your government proceeding with such an initiative and the community health benefits that will flow from it.

A decision to proceed toward a regulated needle and syringe program in the AMC would be a most appropriate public policy.

It would deliver significant returns to the ACT community by protecting prisoners and thus the community from HIV and hepatitis C and other blood borne viruses, while these prisoners are dependent on the care of Government and its custodial officers.

As overseas experience shows, such a facility can be introduced with proper protection for its custodial officers following consultation with them and their trade union representatives. We urge that the Government accept, and act on, the body of expert advice it has received for the protection of prisoners and the communities to which they return.

Yours sincerely,



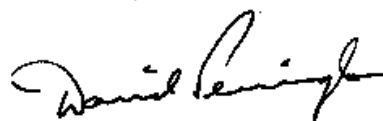
Emeritus Professor Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE



Professor Margaret Hamilton AO



The Hon Michael Kirby AC CMG



Emeritus Professor David Penington AC