



## **WAYSIDE CHAPEL CALLS FOR A DRUG TREATMENT SUMMIT**

Wayside Chapel is hosting a community forum on Thursday, 7 March at 6pm to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tolerance Room – a safe injecting room for drug users – and to call on the NSW Government to hold a drug treatment summit.

The community forum - led by a panel including Jon Owen, CEO and Pastor of Wayside Chapel, Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director of MSIC and Liz Gal from Uniting's Fair Treatment campaign – will discuss the need for a new approach to drug policy in NSW.

In May 1999, Wayside Chapel opened the Tolerance Room over a nine-day period on its Kings Cross premises and allowed drug users to safely inject drugs. This act of civil disobedience drew significant media attention to the crisis of heroin overdoses on the streets of Kings Cross. The bold move resulted in the discussion of a safe injecting centre at the 1999 Drug Summit, and the subsequent approval and opening of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in 2001.

“Wayside Chapel is joining with Uniting to ask the NSW Government to reassess the current approach to drug treatment and bring together politicians, experts, health services and people with lived experience at a drug treatment summit to explore the new context of drugs and how best to treat drug-related issues in our communities. The time has come to treat addiction as primarily a health issue and take urgent action to save lives,” said Jon Owen, CEO and Pastor, Wayside Chapel.

“Every day at Wayside Chapel we see how compassion, love and practical support can change the lives of people living with drug addiction. We want to have an open and honest conversation with the community on why we need a drug treatment summit and why we need to increase and improve the care and support provided to people with drug-related issues,” said Mr Owen.

Wayside Chapel has continued to be a strong supporter of MSIC over its 17 years of operation. Dr Marianne Jauncey from MSIC will join the panel at the community forum.

“The NSW Government’s current approach to drug-related issues focuses on policing and imprisoning people who use illicit drugs which in turn increases stigma and creates barriers to people seeking treatment. Drug-related issues are often linked to complex social circumstances including trauma, abuse, poor mental health and social disadvantage. Effective responses to harmful drug use must address these underlying causes,” said Dr Marianne Jauncey.

The forum is open to all members of the community. People can register for this free event here: <https://www.waysidechapel.org.au/communityforum>.

Ends

For further media information or interviews with CEO/Pastor Jon Owen, Dr Marianne Jauncey or a visitor with lived experience of drug-related issues, contact Emilie Corish, Acting Marketing and Communications Manager on (02) 9581 9106 / 0428 344 019 or via email: [emilie.corish@thewaysidechapel.com](mailto:emilie.corish@thewaysidechapel.com)

### **About Wayside Chapel**

Wayside Chapel has provided unconditional love, care and support for people on and around the streets of Sydney since 1964. Each year, thousands of people visit Wayside's two centres in Kings Cross and Bondi for

assistance in gaining equitable access to essential health, welfare and related services. Wayside Chapel is well known for its Community Services Centres, dedicated Aboriginal Space and Day-to-Day Living Programs. It is also currently rolling out its new Wingspan Project which will return hope to the lives of disadvantaged young people by supporting them into paid hospitality traineeships. Under the banner of 'Love Over Hate', Wayside's programs and services are designed to ensure that the most marginalised members of the community have access to essential health, welfare, social and recreational services. For further information on Wayside Chapel: <https://www.waysidechapel.org.au>