

# Drug Detection Dogs & Strip Searching Policy Statement



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## Summary

Despite low accuracy rates, high costs, extensive harms, and a lack of appropriate animal care, drug detection (sniffer) dogs are being disproportionately used in public spaces primarily occupied by young people, including music festivals and live music events. Drug detection dogs directly cause further individual and social harms, by initiating invasive and humiliating strip searches despite their low accuracy (25%!). Drug detection dogs are often used to detect the presence of prohibited drugs on individuals. Drug detection dogs will give a 'positive indication' to their police handler, usually by sitting, if they detect a scent. Despite the inaccurate and unreliable detection abilities of dogs, police use the positive indications given to conduct general searches and strip searches, which are degrading breaches of privacy that cause psychosocial harms, and rarely result in any 'valuable' findings. The laws which guide strip searching practices are vague, so that despite the invasiveness of the practice, police can conduct the search with limited accountability.

Continuing to use these practices suggests that police are more concerned with a "tough on crime" and therefore "tough on drugs" approach rather than protecting and building relationships with communities. There is substantial backlash against drug dogs and strip searching, particularly among targeted communities such as First Nations peoples, young people, queer people, and people in alternative leisure scenes. SSDP Australia believes that law enforcement has a crucial role in drug policy reform. Sensible policy and practice that supports rather than harms communities is contingent on a policing shift away from criminalising drug use, towards promoting positive health and social outcomes. Critically, this must involve building trust with communities and ending practices that establish or widen the divide between the community and police. Continuing these ineffective and harmful practices is an unacceptable failure of drug policy and policing. The psychological, emotional, social, and physical harms caused by drug detection dogs vastly outweigh their benefits, and present an all-around ineffective strategy for preventing drug use. The use of drug dogs and strip searching violates the human rights and dignity of people who use drugs and all communities targeted by these practices, while also exacerbating drug-related harms by encouraging dangerous consumption.

## Policy Demands

1. The use of **drug detection dogs** should be **banned** by **all Australian jurisdictions** in **community settings** to **police drugs**.
2. The use of **strip searching** for **policing drugs** should be **banned** by **all Australian jurisdictions**.
3. The systemic use of **strip searches** in **custodial settings** to **punish and humiliate** people should be **banned**.
4. **Precise and specific laws** to regulate the **wider use of strip searching** should be introduced in **all Australian jurisdictions**.
5. **Accountability and transparency** should be promoted through **accurate reporting** and **publicly available evidence** on how **search powers are exercised** by Australian police.
6. **Law enforcement resources** should be **reinvested** into evidence-based programs and practices that focus on **community care**.
7. Enhance the role of **police** in **community care** for music festival and nightlife patrons.

