

From: [william spaul](#)
To: [Committee, Health \(REPS\)](#)
Subject: Submission to the inquiry on health impacts of alcohol and other drugs in Australia
Date: Tuesday, 31 December 2024 5:50:40 PM

Dear Secretariat

Please see my submission below.

Thank you

Kind regards

William Spaul

Thank you for the chance to make a submission. I write as:

- a concerned citizen;
- one who volunteered with crisis hotlines for more than a decade in which capacity I received many calls from those with addiction problems or their family members; and
- someone who has lost a family member (my brother, when he was 23) due to alcohol use.

My submission is that current programs, initiatives and policies relevant to addiction issues are insufficiently effective and that one of the reasons for that is they largely fail to recognise:

- the importance of purpose and meaning in the prevention of or recovery from addictions;
- the importance of purpose and meaning in the prevention of or recovery from mental health problems which can make people more susceptible to addictions, such as depression or anxiety; and
- one way of obtaining meaning and purpose is to help others. As I noted in my LLM thesis *Liability in Negligence of Clergy and Churches in New South Wales for Pastoral Counselling for Depression*, prominent mental health professionals such as Seligman have for decades recognised the value of altruism in preventing or reducing depression (see e.g. M.E.P. Seligman 1991 *Learned Optimism*, Random House Australia, Sydney, 290).

There is plenty of evidence to the effect that having a sense of purpose and meaning in life helps prevent addictions and helps people recover if they become addicted. Such evidence has been available for decades or longer and is readily available. Similarly, evidence that purpose and meaning help prevent or reduce problems such as depression and anxiety has long been readily available.

A quick google search yielded the following evidence in support of the above, for example:

The relationship between purpose in life and depression and anxiety: A meta-analysis

Journal of Clinical Psychology, published online 12 August 2023.

Purpose in Life Can Lead to Less Stress, Better Mental Well-being

American Psychiatric Association, 7 December 2023

Purpose in life as an asset for well-being and a protective factor against depression in adolescents

Frontiers in Psychology, 27 September 2023

Purpose in Life Predicts Treatment Outcome Among Adult Cocaine Abusers in Treatment

Published in final edited form as: J Subst Abuse Treat. 2010 Dec 3;40(2):183–188.

Sense of Purpose in Life and Likelihood of Future Illicit Drug Use or Prescription Medication Misuse

Published in final edited form as: Psychosom Med. 2020 Sep;82(7):715–721.

Meaning in Life and Substance Use

Journal of Humanistic Psychology, First published online January 23, 2017.

The association between meaning in life and harmful drinking is mediated by individual differences in self-control and alcohol value

Addictive Behaviours Reports, Volume 11, June 2020.

Addiction and a Lack of Purpose

How the opioid epidemic is related to a "purpose deficient" culture.

Posted November 30, 2018. S. Taylor PhD.

Unfortunately, however, there is nil or negligible recognition of the above by the Commonwealth or the states or territories. For example, I could not detect anything relevant in the *National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028*.

The Commonwealth, states and territories ought do much more to help people obtain purpose and meaning in their lives, including school children. Books about meaning such as *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl could be part of curricula. Without more focus at a population level on helping people obtain meaning measures which attempt to reduce addiction problems will continue to be too little, too late.

Yours sincerely

William Spaul