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## VERBAL CONSENT SHEET – INFORMATION STATEMENT & CONSENT

(for ‘Telephone or VoIP Interview’)

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**Title: The impacts of COVID-19 on illicit drug trafficking and supply in Australia**

### 1. Introduction

My name is Caitlin Hughes and I work at the Centre for Crime Policy and Research at Flinders University, College of Business, Government and Law. I am conducting a research study with two other colleagues – David Bright and R.V. Gundur – into the impacts of COVID-19 on illicit drug trafficking and supply in Australia. Today I am here with my colleague xxx. *(All interviews will involve Caitlin Hughes and David Bright or R.V. Gundur).*

This project aims to identify the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on illicit drug purchasing, trafficking and supply in Australia, including any changes in the availability of illicit drugs, drug price and purity, and the mechanisms of purchase, production and sale. The project has two elements: the first was a national online survey on purchasing and supply. That has now been completed. The second is a telephone or VoIP interview with people who supply drugs (this current element).

Together this project will provide one of the first studies in Australia or internationally to look at how the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions is impacting drug supply and trafficking. This will fill key gaps in knowledge about what is happening and inform future policy and practice such as the design of harm reduction and treatment services. It will also add to the global body of work that is comparing pandemic impacts on drug supply in different parts of the world and any specific differences in the Australian context.

Do you have any questions regarding the information that I have provided?

- ☐ If yes, clarify.
- ☐ If no, proceed with the following information

### 2. Invitation

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study. Before we go any further, I need to let you know that participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to. Are you happy for me to provide you with further information on the research study?

- ☐ If no, thank the participant for their time and end the consent process.
- ☐ If yes, proceed with the following information.

### 3. Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Before you decide to participate in this arm of the research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part. We are looking recruit people who meet the following criteria:

- Live in Australia
- Aged 18 or over
- Have supplied illicit drugs during the last 12 months – including pre and post COVID-19. By supply I mean the provision of drugs for cash, goods or on credit.

Do you fit these three criteria?

- ☐ If no, thank the participant for their time and end the consent process.
- ☐ If yes, proceed with the following information.

#### **4. Description of participation**

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will ask you to take part in a 45-60 minute interview about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Australian drug market and the operations of people who supply drugs. You will have the option to choose how to conduct the interview: via telephone or VoIP – specifically via the signal or wickr app (using end to end encryption). We will ask you about your typical illicit drug supply arrangements, such as how long you have been in the trade and what types of drugs you supply. Then we will ask you your observations of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on drug supply and demand in Australia e.g. has it affected illicit drug availability or the number of people who want to buy drugs and has it impacted all parts of Australia equally. In the final section, we will ask you about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on you and your operations such as have you been able to maintain a constant level of supply (and why or why not) and have you had to change your modus operandi and if so in what ways (e.g. more home drops), and your reflections on how the Australian drug market has fared under COVID-19 relative to other parts of the globe. It should take 45-60 minutes to complete.

We don't expect the telephone or VoIP interview to cause any harm or discomfort, however if you experience feelings of distress as a result of participation in this study you can let the research team know and we will refer you to the following 24/7 services:

Lifeline: 131 114

National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline: 1800 250 015

#### **5. Will I be identifiable in this study?**

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will not collect any information that may be used to identify you, such as your name or address. Details of your phone number, username or id will be stored in a separate encrypted file and will continue to be kept separate to any data that is collected.

With your permission the interview will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help data collection and analysis. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up). If you do not wish to be recorded written notes will be taken instead. If you elect to be audio-recorded, you also have the option to review your interview transcript. Transcripts will be made available via the wickr or signal app using end-to-end encryption 7-10 days after the interview.

Any information we collect from you will be stored and presented in research publications in a way that will not identify you. As such your participation will be anonymous and confidential, except as required by law.

#### **6. Legal requirements on reporting of criminal activities**

Given the nature of the interview – namely the focus on illicit drug supply – we are required to inform you about the requirements for mandatory reporting of criminal activities. We will generally not disclose information without your consent but researchers in Australia are required to report information that might be of material assistance in securing the apprehension, prosecution or conviction in relation to a criminal offence e.g. drug trafficking. In that case, the information could potentially be used against you in legal proceedings or otherwise.

To minimise risks, you should not tell us anything specific about drug trafficking events or activities. Please don't tell us things like names of individuals involved, specific dates or specific places of illegal activities. That said, we have deliberately designed the interview to avoid asking about such details. And over many years of research, we have never been required by law to provide our research information to anyone else.

## **7. Voluntary participation and withdrawal from the research**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or concerned. As noted above you also have the option to choose how to conduct the interview: via telephone or VoIP – specifically via the signal or wickr app – and as to whether the interview is audio-recorded. You are also free to withdraw from the interview at any time without effect or consequences. If you decide to leave the research study, we will not collect additional information from you. Any information about you will be withdrawn from the research project. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not affect your relationship with Flinders University or the researchers involved in this study.

## **8. Participant reimbursement**

Should you choose to participate, we will provide you with a \$50 Coles or WISH e-Gift Card in recognition of your contribution and time. This will be sent out via the wickr or signal app at the completion of the interview.

## **9. Data storage and use**

Should you choose to take part during the research study your data will be kept for 5 years after the project's completion. Your information will only be used for the purposes of this study and for publication in peer reviewed journal articles and research bulletins. Any information we collect from you will be stored and presented in research publications in a way that will not identify you. Any results and publications will be made available via the project website at [sites.flinders.edu.au/covid-drug-supply](https://sites.flinders.edu.au/covid-drug-supply).

## **10. Questions**

Do you have any questions in regards to the information that I have provided?

- ☐ If yes, answer any questions the participant may have
- ☐ If no, continue to collect consent

## **11. Consent**

Now that I have explained what your involvement in the research study requires, are you happy to provide your consent to participate in the study?

- ☐ If no, thank the participant for their time and end the consent process.
- ☐ If yes, ensure you record the time and date the verbal consent was collected from the participant.

Are you happy to be audio recorded?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, are you happy to review your interview transcript?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

→ Commence with data collection.

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project number HEG1851-1). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project please contact the Executive Officer of the Committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*