

## ALP plan: principles supported but legal drugs need more attention: National Council



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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD), the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy, has given 'in principle' support to most of the objectives expressed in the Australian Labor Party's 10 point plan to tackle drugs.

Chairman of the Council, Major Brian Watters, stated "Although detail about the estimated level of funding commitment is still to be provided, all Council members would agree that it is important to keep people alive, protect families and communities and address drug related crime. Furthermore, recognition of the importance of community involvement is also the position of the Council."

Major Watters continued, "The ALP plan expresses understandable concern about illicit drugs. However there is no mention in the document of the costs to the community arising from the misuse of alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs. The ANCD's message to Labor is don't forget about the legal drugs and the damage they are causing in the pursuit of a strong approach to illicit drugs."

"In relation to heroin trials and medically supervised injecting facilities, all political parties should recognise that community support and proper evaluation are essential elements of any trial. Furthermore, the evidence gained must robustly support the introduction of these initiatives, and the community be convinced of the merit and support such approaches before they are implemented. For this reason, the ANCD supports the caution expressed in this policy statement in relation to these two matters" Major Watters noted.

Professor Margaret Hamilton, an Executive Member of the ANCD and Director of Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre, said "It shouldn't be surprising that there is a great deal of similarity in the main thrust of the Howard Government's Tough on Drugs Strategy and the ALP policy announced today. The reality is that behind the rhetoric, any reasoned approach to drug policy must consider the reduction of the supply of drugs, reduction of demand for drugs and a commitment to reducing the harm that arises from drug use, both to the user and community. The ALP's statement addresses and continues these three main pillars of drug policy, and the ANCD looks forward to seeing some more detail emerge".

Finally, Major Watters added, "The role of the ANCD is to provide independent expert advice, and in particular, represent the interest of the non-government sector in regard to national policy. We applaud the bi-partisan approach that lifts drug policies above party politics. Accordingly the Council would be pleased to offer its expertise and resources to the ALP in the further development of its 10 point drug plan".

*23 February 2001*

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