

## ANCD launches Homeless Information Portal—31 October 2008

Australian National Council on Drugs says it's time for a much bigger focus on helping people experiencing homelessness with alcohol and drug problems — some reports are highlighting that a person experiencing homelessness is 33 times more likely to have an opiate problem, 6 times more likely to have a drug use disorder and for those 'sleeping rough' over half are dependent on alcohol. 

Dr John Herron says there are opportunities for doing good work to help people experiencing homelessness but many services need additional resources and support to deal with the high levels of drug and alcohol problems amongst their clients

A major new [website](#) has been designed to support homelessness services helping their clients with drug and alcohol problems and will be launched today (Friday October 31st) at the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Sydney.

ANCD Chairman Dr John Herron says there needs to be a much greater investment and focus placed on helping people who are experiencing homelessness deal with alcohol and drug issues — with some studies showing:

- a person experiencing homelessness is 33 times more likely to have an opiate problem;
- a person experiencing homelessness is 6 times more likely to have a drug use disorder;
- in NSW 14.6% of people requiring support accommodation had problematic drug and alcohol use;
- in Sydney a service providing assistance to people who sleep rough, reported that up to 55% of its clients have a dependence on alcohol;
- in a national survey of injecting drug users over 10% reported that they had no fixed address;
- in a survey of emergency accommodation services in Australia it was reported that nearly all services dealt with young people that were both experiencing homelessness and substance use dependence.

Dr John Herron said “People who work within the homeless sector are of great value to the whole community and work very hard to assist their clients. As a community we need to provide these workers with greater support and resources to help break the cycle of homelessness of which drug and alcohol misuse problems play a major part.”

“This sector is at the frontline of helping people who face serious substance use or mental health problems and effective assistance at the right time can be the difference between people regaining the place they seek in our community or a prolonged life on the streets or in some cases far worse outcomes, such as prison. We're deeply concerned about the high rates of alcohol and drug misuse amongst people experiencing homelessness. We are also deeply concerned at the exposure of children affected by homelessness to other people's substance use or even more concerning using any substances themselves to cope with the distress and trauma from homelessness. If we don't protect young people from this we know the severe consequences this may cause them and their families.”

“We're ultimately talking about a group of people who are often out of sight and out of mind for many. There is a view sometimes that people who are experiencing homelessness are the ones at fault and that's just not true. We welcome the focus that the Prime Minister and his government are bringing to helping those experiencing homelessness because there are over 100,000 people often in desperate need of help. As an affluent society we can and should do much better.”

“What we would like to see is an increase in the support available to services that help people who are experiencing homelessness to address drug and alcohol misuse, as well as mental health issues. We want to see more resources for homeless centres that are working around the clock and feel frustrated that often they aren’t able to address some of these core problems because of a lack of resources.”

Recent figures have shown that over 100,000 people are homeless every night — a third of them are under the age of 25 and 22,000 of them are teenagers. This problem has been estimated to have doubled in the past 20 years.

Dr John Herron says the most recent statistics are a real cause for concern:

- 12,133 of Australia’s homeless are children under the age of 12
- Over 100,000 people are homeless with more than 16,000 ‘sleeping rough’ — 7,500 are families with children
- Over 46,000 people experiencing homelessness are staying with friends and relatives and over 21,000 are staying in boarding houses
- 56% of those experiencing homelessness are male, 10% are indigenous and 7% are over 65.

The new website launched today — located at [www.hip.org.au](http://www.hip.org.au) — offers a range of fact sheets for homeless service providers on addressing drug and alcohol problems with people experiencing homelessness. It also offers an extensive database of services that could work with the homeless services/sector to help people with drug and alcohol misuse problems.

ANCD Executive member, Professor Margaret Hamilton said “Safe and secure accommodation is a fundamental requirement for all of us. For many of those who are in trouble with their alcohol and drug use, this is one of the hardest things to achieve and possibly one of the most disruptive aspects of any effort to get control over their drug and alcohol use.

People and organisations who provide services to people experiencing homelessness should be seen as providing one of the prime sites for our drug and alcohol interventions and treatments.

For many people there is a spiral or cycle of difficulty, disruption and distress. To break the cycle associated with harmful drug use requires an effort to gain control, structure, meaning and identity in ones life. Failure to do this often produces anxiety, depression and other mental illness as well as significant risk to physical health and general safety. In this context, the most immediate relief is often alcohol and drug use that can numb the immediate crisis.

Care, support, professional responses and treatment should be the right of any person in the community suffering with drug and alcohol trouble and dependence. Those who are experiencing homelessness are citizens who are no different. The likelihood of them needing this type of response is even greater than the general community”.

Dr John Heron acknowledged that in 2006 this project was prompted by the strong advocacy of Professor Ian Webster (an ANCD member from 1998 til 2007) who has, and still continues to work and support the homeless sector over many years. As a result, the ANCD commissioned the development of some work toward providing a resource that could assist those working in the homeless sector. This was developed by the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University in conjunction with the Ted Noffs Foundation and Bartholomew House. It involved a long process of consultation with services and is especially timely given the

imminent release of a major new approach for addressing homelessness in Australia.

Mr Gino Vumbaca, ANCD Executive Director added “The fact is that homeless services are often being stretched to capacity dealing with the day to day crisis that people are facing. This makes it very hard for them to then address any underlying issues. The ANCD is ultimately concerned for all people with drug and alcohol problems. People experiencing homelessness present some of our most complex and difficult cases of substance misuse and mental health illness. If we can’t provide the support and resources necessary for the staff that work hard to help these people then we are failing some of our most vulnerable citizens.”

The new website [www.hip.org.au](http://www.hip.org.au) will be officially launched on October 31st. It’s been specifically designed to be used by people who work in the homeless sector, shelters and organisations who have face to face interaction with people experiencing homelessness.

This resource is designed to provide information about ways of working and opportunities that exist to work in partnership with other organisations either directly through referral pathways or indirectly through accessing secondary consultation and other ways of ensuring that one of the contributors to or causes of a persons experience of homelessness is addressed - their risky and harmful alcohol, tobacco and drug use.

The ANCD is hopeful that it will at least provide some support those workers that represent the front line contact opportunity in many of the lives of peoples living with homelessness.

The launch of the website is being held in Sydney on October 31st at the Mathew Talbot Centre at 12pm and will include short speeches from:

- Dr John Herron — Chairman of the Australian National Council on Drugs
- Professor Margaret Hamilton — Australian National Council on Drugs Executive member and also Chair, Vic Multiple and Complex Needs Panel
- Professor Ian Webster
- Matthew Talbot Hostel Staff
- Former Clients of Homelessness Services

*31 October 2008*

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