

Communique—December 2007

The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) is the principal advisory body to the Government on drug policy and plays a critical role in ensuring the voice of the community is heard in relation to drug related policies and strategies. 

The ANCD consists of representatives from the non government and government drug and alcohol and related sectors (treatment, research, law enforcement, education etc) from around Australia.

Council meetings and consultations with people working with drug and alcohol issues are held in a different State or Territory every three months. Through these meetings and consultation forums, the ANCD is able to ensure that the views of the sector, in particular non-government, community-based organisations are considered as part of drug policy advice.

In late November 2007 in Hobart the ANCD:

- received informative presentations from the Tasmanian Department of Human & Health Services and from the NGO AOD peak body — ATDC;
- held a consultation forum with agencies working with drug and alcohol related matters; and
- conducted its regular quarterly meeting.

As a result, the following issues have been highlighted by ANCD members for this communiqué:

AOD Consultation Forum:

Drug and Alcohol Treatment Capacity

The forum was dominated by a concern on the lack of availability and funding support for drug and alcohol services, particularly in the NGO sector.

Specifically there was concern over:

- the adverse affect on the workforce from being unable to meet increasing demands on their services;
- the missed opportunities from being unable to provide treatment at a time when people were ready to enter treatment;
- the adverse affect this could have on new programs such as the court mandated drug diversion program, given magistrates may reduce their support for a scheme that is unable to adequately provide treatment alternatives to legal sanctions;

The forum also discussed the upcoming completion of the much anticipated Tasmanian Drug & Alcohol Services Review as an opportunity to ensure that a systematic approach to increasing treatment capacity in Tasmania could be undertaken.

ANCD Meeting:

Welcome for New Federal Government

The members of the ANCD congratulated Prime Minister Rudd on his recent election and the announcement of the Ministry. The ANCD looks forward to working with the Prime Minister and his team to resolve the many drug and alcohol issues adversely affecting Australian communities. In particular the ANCD looks forward to utilising its broad based expertise to assist the new government across a number of portfolios.

Beyond 2008 — a review of the 1998 United Nations General Assembly Special

Session (UNGASS) on Illicit Drugs

On behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs the ANCD has completed its consultations with Australian NGOs to ensure its views are represented in the 10 year review of the 1998 UNGASS outcomes. The process is known as Beyond 2008 and the ANCD will be releasing its report, as well as a collaborative report with its New Zealand counterparts (led by the NZ Drug Foundation) after their consultations are completed in February 2008.

The process is supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and includes consultations in all regions across the world.

Therapeutic Communities

The ANCD received a presentation from Dr Rex Haigh (UK) and the Australasian Therapeutic Communities Association (ATCA) on the current evidence base for therapeutic communities. The ANCD acknowledged the real progress made by Australian therapeutic communities over many years and supported the need for further strengthening of their evidence base through a greater investment in collaborative research. The importance of supporting ATCA to develop appropriate accreditation processes for therapeutic communities in Australia was also supported by the ANCD.

Northern Territory Intervention

The ANCD noted that the new Federal Government would be reviewing the NT Intervention and strongly recommended that the Federal Government utilise the broad expertise of the National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) to assist in this review. Ensuring that appropriate consultation with Indigenous people occurs in the development and implementation of Indigenous policy and programs is critical for success and NIDAC represents a readily available and unparalleled level of expertise in Indigenous drug and alcohol issues. Ensuring evaluation programs are in place to promote success beyond the Northern Territory was also highlighted by the ANCD.

Drugs in Sport Issues

The ANCD discussed the ongoing debate on the best policy response to address drug use by sportspeople. The ANCD will be writing to the Prime Minister and his ministers to provide advice on a potential pathway to assist sporting organisations to effectively tackle alcohol and drug misuse.

'Of Substance' Update

'Of Substance' is an ANCD initiative and is produced with funding from the Department of Health and Ageing. 'Of Substance' is a free, quarterly magazine. The next edition will be out in January 2008 and includes a focus on the NT Intervention. There are currently over 15,000 copies of the magazine in circulation each quarter. The Of Substance website www.ofsubstance.org.au provides access to all copies of the magazine and article search facilities.

Next Meeting

Members were informed that the next meeting will be in Sydney from the 4th–5th of March 2008 where a consultation forum will also be held with agencies.

Conclusion

More information on the Australian National Council on Drugs is available by accessing the ANCD website: www.ancd.org.au or by contacting the ANCD Secretariat: PO Box 205

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