

Communique—September 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 September 2007 in Brisbane the ANCD:

- received informative presentations from the Queensland Department of Health ATOD Branch and from representatives of the newly established NGO AOD peak body – QNADA;
- held a consultation forum with agencies working with drug and alcohol related matters;
- released a report on Compulsory Treatment & Diversion; and
- conducted its regular quarterly meeting.

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

AOD Consultation Forum:

Building & Retaining Capacity in the NGO Sector

Similar to many sectors in Australia, the drug and alcohol NGO sector is facing a looming workforce crisis in recruitment, training and the provision of career paths for staff to ensure retention.

Competing with government sectors that are providing higher salary and stronger security of employment is also a difficulty being increasingly encountered by the NGO sector. Ensuring NGOs are able to offer attractive remuneration and employment conditions is an area that needs to also be addressed within the funding and grants processes of governments.

The need to balance client-service based funding with providing the NGO sector with access to funding for infrastructure was also highlighted as an area for attention.

Foetal Alcohol & Drug Use Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

The ANCD received representations of the lack of understanding and response to the extent and impact of FASD in the community. It is an issue that the ANCD has endeavoured to promote activity on for some time. Accordingly, the ANCD has agreed to gather more information on this matter to provide advice to governments and the community on future actions to address this issue.

Co-morbidity Issues

The funding available under the current COAG Mental Health package is widely supported but there is a real need to develop, and adequately resource and support health services to put in place systems and models that provide effective treatment for people with drug use and mental health problems (please see ANCD Projects for further information on ANCD view on potentially resolving this matter)

Announcement of New Funding by Queensland Government

The ANCD welcomed the announcement of new funding for Indigenous alcohol diversion programs that build upon the successful COAG Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative.

ANCD Meeting:

Beyond 2008 – A review of the 1998 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Illicit Drugs.

The ANCD has accepted an invitation from the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs to conduct consultations with Australian NGOs and assist in regional consultations as part of a wider process to ensure the views of the NGO sector are heard in the 10 year review of the 1998 UNGASS outcomes. The process is known as Beyond 2008 and the ANCD will be advising the sector of more details on this process, including the collaboration with its New Zealand counterparts to develop a united report from the 2 countries.

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

ANCD Projects

The ANCD commissions some specific work and research projects each year. For the current financial year the following research projects are being developed:

1. Exploring the extent and impact of ATS use and injecting drug use in Indigenous communities;
2. Investigating alcohol intoxication in Australia

In addition, the ANCD will be requesting further information or recommending further work to a number of government departments on the following issues:

- Obtaining current and reliable data on Indigenous drug use prevalence and trends
- Reviewing the current state of research and knowledge on the extent, impact and recommendations for addressing FASD
- Investigating the impact of drug use on economic development in the Asia-Pacific region
- Reviewing the current state of research and knowledge on the neuroscientific effects of drug and alcohol use, particularly on the developing brain in young people
- Developing workforce projections for the AOD sector
- Developing best management and treatment models for co-morbidity
- Investigating the links between suicide risks and drug and alcohol use

In addition the ANCD resolved to:

- Review completed ANCD reports for consideration of updating in future years
- Develop a strategy to engage and communicate with young people on a range drug and alcohol issues

Schoolies Week

The ANCD received a presentation on the work and research undertaken by Drug Arm Australasia in Queensland. The extent of the alcohol, and other drugs consumed at 'Schoolies Week' and the potential for a range of harms to occur was disturbing. The ANCD acknowledged the good work undertaken by many NGOs at 'Schoolies Weeks' around the country, often with little financial support.

Indigenous Issues

The ANCD discussed the current focus on Indigenous drug and alcohol issues, particularly the Northern Territory Emergency Response and will be requesting that the following two principles be paramount throughout the decision making processes:

1. Ensuring consultation with Indigenous communities occurs — including government departments utilising the wide expertise of the National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) on these matters;
2. The need to review and evaluate the impact of all decisions so this policy and program intervention can assist in future decisions.

Asia-Pacific Issues

The ANCD received a report from its Chairman, Dr Herron, on his recent presentation and visit to Manila as part of a regional meeting on ATS use. The ANCD has reiterated its support for Australia increasing its support and assistance for regional activities, particularly in the area of treatment, harm reduction and law enforcement co-operation.

'Of Substance' Update

'Of Substance' is an Australian National Council on Drugs initiative and is produced with funding from the Department of Health and Ageing. 'Of Substance' is a free, quarterly magazine. The next edition is currently in print and includes an election special on the drug policies of political parties. There are currently over 13,500 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 Hobart from the 29th – 30th of November 2007 where a consultation forum will also be held with agencies.