

Communique - March 2008

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 March 2008 in Sydney the ANCD:

- received informative presentations from the NSW Health Department and from the Non- Government Organisation Alcohol & Other Drug peak body – Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies NADA;
- 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:

The forum was dominated by concern on the lack of availability of key drug and alcohol data, funding commitments and service accreditation.

Specifically there was concern over:

- the failure to continue to collect alcohol sales data, particularly given its importance in any decision making process regarding licensing;
- the failure to collect and make available relevant Indigenous drug and alcohol related data;
- the failure to make all data available on a comparable jurisdictional basis;
- the current lack of certainty on continued Federal Government funding beyond June 2008 for a range of drug and alcohol programs, such as the Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative, and the dramatic impact this is having on the NGO and government drug and alcohol sectors;
- the difficulty for drug and alcohol services in currently obtaining and maintaining appropriate accreditation.
- Additionally, the forum also discussed the important role of local governments in drug and alcohol policies and programs. In particular their key role in addressing local alcohol related issues was highlighted.

ANCD Meeting:

Alcohol Sales Data

The members of the ANCD expressed their strong concern at the 'morally irresponsible' position of alcohol licensing decisions continuing to be undertaken without access to key data such as alcohol sales. In addition,

the need for regular localised reports on data for alcohol issues such as hospitalisations and assaults was also highlighted by the ANCD as being critical in the decision making process.

Accordingly, the ANCD strongly recommended that licensing authorities in each jurisdiction commit to ensuring that all relevant data is collected and shared in a timely manner with all parties affected by licensing decisions, including local governments, police and community representatives.

Indigenous Issues

The ANCD discussed a range of issues affecting Indigenous people. Specifically the ANCD:

- Welcomed the commitment of a further \$50million funding by the Federal Government for remote Indigenous drug and alcohol services;
- Highlighted the important need for consultation on the allocation of funding to be inclusive of community and NGO based Indigenous representatives;
- Requested that the Federal Government ensure in its review of the Northern Territory Intervention that all racially discriminatory aspects of the Intervention are removed otherwise they will inevitably damage the health and well being of those communities;
- Requested that all governments ensure they also provide sufficient attention, support and funding to address the drug and alcohol issues affecting Indigenous people that live in urban centres around Australia.
- Recognised the significance of the National Apology in allowing the nation to renew and revitalise its efforts to address issues adversely affecting Indigenous people.

Local Government

The ANCD received a presentation on the range of drug and alcohol issues involving local governments around Australia. The critical and difficult role of local governments in addressing local issues and concerns whilst maintaining consistency with national policies was recognised. In particular, the role of local governments in managing public amenity and planning issues affecting licensing & drug and alcohol program decisions was highlighted.

Accordingly, the ANCD recommended that Local Government become a key strategic partner in the development of national drug and alcohol policy and program development in Australia.

Preventative Health Care

In noting the recent report released by the AIHW on the level of investment in preventative health the dramatic decline in funding for drug and alcohol programs was a major concern for the ANCD.

Accordingly, the ANCD recommended that all governments commit to a minimum 2% of annual preventative funding being allocated to drug and alcohol programs.

Workforce Participation Strategy

The ANCD welcomed the development of a national workforce participation strategy by the Federal Government and strongly recommended that addressing the needs of people with drug and alcohol

dependency issues should be a critical component of the strategy.

Health Care Agreements

The ANCD welcomed the establishment of key benchmarks as part of the new health care agreements currently being established between the Federal and State/Territory Governments. The potential importance of these agreements in collecting data to further inform evidence based decision making processes was acknowledged by the ANCD.

Accordingly, the ANCD will support this process by liaising with key drug and alcohol researchers and practitioners as a matter of urgency to develop key drug and alcohol benchmarks for consideration by governments.

Asia-Pacific Issues

The ANCD received advice on the growing international reputation and demand for Australian drug and alcohol expertise in the Region. The ability of Australia to meet these expectations was however severely hampered by the continuing lack of a real commitment of funding to support and assist countries in the Region, particularly in regard to drug and alcohol demand reduction strategies.

Accordingly, the ANCD recommended that an appropriate Asia-Pacific Drug & Alcohol Strategy that focuses equally on supply, demand and harm reduction strategies be developed and appropriately funded.

'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 April 2008 and includes a focus on alcohol. There are currently over 16,000 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 Perth from the 5th–6th of June 2008 where a consultation forum will also be held with agencies on the Thursday the 6th of June (9:00 am – 11:00 am).

Conclusion

More information on the Australian National Council on Drugs is available by accessing the ANCD website: www.ancd.org.au or by contacting Mr Gino Vumbaca, Executive Director of the ANCD on 02 6166 9600 or 0408 244 552

Postscript: The ANCD recently conveyed their thanks personally to the Prime Minister and the Federal Government on the announcement and significant funding of the 1st Stage of the National Binge Drinking Strategy on the 10th of March 2008.

