

## Communique - October 2013

The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) is the principal advisory body to the Prime Minister and Federal Government on drug and alcohol policy and plays a critical role in ensuring the views of the many sectors involved in addressing drug and alcohol problems, as well as the community, are heard. 

The ANCD membership for the 2011-2014 term was announced in 2011 by the Prime Minister and includes people from the non government and government drug, alcohol and related sectors including treatment, medicine, research, law enforcement, Indigenous health, local government, education, mental health, consumers, and the magistracy from around Australia. The full membership can be found at: [ANCD Members](#)

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### ANCD Consultation Forum

The ANCD met in Hobart in late October 2013. This meeting was preceded by a consultation forum with people who work to address drug and alcohol issues. The forum was attended by 40-50 people and included presentations from Ms Jann Smith (CEO, Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council Tasmania - ATDC) and Ms Sylvia Engels (Manager, Policy Development, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug Directorate, Department of Health and Human Services).

Matters discussed during the forum included:

- The lack of a specific drug services consumer group in Tasmania and a perceived lack of consultation with actual consumers although there was acknowledgement on the funding of a broader consumer advocacy group and the crucial importance of drug consumer voices in drug policy processes.
- There were a number of issues surrounding opioid pharmacotherapy treatment in Tasmania. Whilst some noted that the program did not currently utilise all its allocated places, there was also a strong view that demand is high for treatment. In trying to understand this apparent contradiction discussion went to possible barriers to the program. It was also noted that there are reports of negative attitudes toward pharmacotherapy clients; a shortfall of practitioners in Tasmania generally, a need for more GPs and pharmacists to engage in the program and inflexibility in the program model. A need for a shared solution between all involved and affected parties was highlighted, with examples of models from other jurisdictions noted.
- The general lack of access to AOD treatment, and opioid pharmacotherapy specifically, in the prison system was also raised as an issue, as well as the need for prisoners upon release to be able to access community based programs to continue with treatment.
- Representatives from the Department of Health & Human Services acknowledged some of these issues and advised of their current efforts to try and overcome these barriers.
- The higher rates of tobacco use in Tasmania in comparison to national rates.
- Issues of poverty and lower socioeconomic status overall in Tasmania, and their links to higher risk and increased drug and alcohol related problems.
- The opportunities afforded by the large number of projects currently being undertaken at the Federal level on the future of AOD interventions and services in Australia were noted. With a particular focus on the need for these projects to link up to each other. The issue of 'review fatigue' in the sector was also raised by some.

- The potential impact of recent reductions in the level of needle and syringe program services being offered in Tasmania.
- The current gaps in services in Tasmania, such as in the availability of residential treatment services for women, women with children, and young people.
- The apparent increase in methamphetamine use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the general lack of engagement and information on the needs of Indigenous communities.
- The impact on staffing within AOD sector (and other community services) as a result of the vulnerable people checks legislation.
- The current review of the Liquor Licensing Act and how this may afford an important opportunity to address harms associated with alcohol use.
- The inquiry into alternatives to youth detention, which currently accounts for a high proportion of the youth justice budget, and the opportunities for justice reinvestment based approaches
- The diminishing resources within the sector, and the effects this is already having on client access to services, as well as the health practitioner, administrative and policy workforce which were considered to be worsening over time.

### **ANCD Meeting**

The ANCD discussed and determined action on a number of matters at its meeting. These included:

- The need to engage with all governments to promote a far more balanced response to new psychoactive substances (NPS). In particular, the need for a greater focus on prevention, treatment and ensuring consumers are not inadvertently criminalised particularly where other evidence based options were available.
- Addressing the current lack of data available on participation in diversion programs and the level of funding support it receives.
- Preparations for the upcoming NIDAC conference. The conference will take place in Melbourne on 4-6 June 2014.
- The continuing challenge in providing accurate and currently relevant data in the public domain and ensuring an appropriate response to overdoses, given rates can change quickly but current data systems are not timely.
- The importance of continued expansion, evaluation and peer involvement in naloxone programs and other overdose prevention efforts throughout Australia.
- The need to address the continuing community concerns about the high levels of risky alcohol use, and their associated harms.
- The availability of a paper released by Jobs Australia, Reforming employment assistance: A blueprint for the future - with conclusions that are generally consistent with the ANCD's position developed in some previous work surrounding employment issues for people with alcohol or drug use treatments or histories.
- Discussion of a new process for development of ANCD Projects with the development and trialling of an expanded consultation on the focus and scope of projects, utilising a web-based Expression of Ideas approach to the sector.
- Plans to release a number of reports in coming months, including:
  - Alcohol Action Plan.
  - Link between ATS use and the transmission of HIV and other BBVs in the South East Asia region (APDDIC).
  - Survey of young people's attitudes and views about alcohol and other drug issues.
  - Secondary school principals' opinions regarding alcohol and other drug issues for schools. This will be accompanied by a letter to education ministers on alcohol and drug issues in schools, and a

checklist for schools on development of alcohol and drug policies.

- Members received an update on the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC). Highlights included progress on NIDAC's work on a professional body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AOD workers; the release of a position statement on funding; participation in the Justice Roundtable; and the report on consultations undertaken by NIDAC for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Drug Strategy.
- Members received an update on the Asia-Pacific Drugs and Development Issues Committee (APDDIC). Highlights included the upcoming launch of a report on ATS use and BBVs in the Asia Pacific, continued work with the UN on compulsory treatment centres and the release of the APDDIC Strategic Plan.
- Members received an update on the current national projects being undertaken at the Commonwealth level.
- Members received the following presentations:
  - Dr Adrian Reynolds discussed alcohol policy in Australia. Dr Reynolds' presentation included information on the scope of health and social problems related to alcohol use, the evidence-base available on interventions that can work to reduce these problems, and strategies for getting these interventions accepted into policy.
  - Professor Jon Currie discussed drug treatment. Professor Currie provided information on the neurology of drug use, the role of this information in conceptions of drug use and addiction, and the principles following from it for treatment, including the program offered by the National Centre for the Neurobiological Treatment of Addiction (NCeNTA).

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As previously agreed with the Prime Minister, the ANCD will provide a report on the outcomes and discussions of each ANCD meeting. The next meeting of the ANCD, which will include a consultation forum, will take place in March 2014.

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Further information on the ANCD's work and activities can be found on the ANCD websites:

[Australian National Council on Drugs](#)  
[National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee](#)  
[Of Substance & Jobs of Substance](#)  
[Asia Pacific Drug Issues Committee](#)  
[Positive Stories](#)

For any further details on this communiqué please contact the ANCD Secretariat on [ancd@ancd.org.au](mailto:ancd@ancd.org.au) or (02) 6166 9600