

It's time: National Council calls for warning labels on alcohol

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) recently convened in Adelaide for its final meeting of 2004, which also provided the opportunity to meet with the newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Christopher Pyne MP. During the ANCD meeting members discussed a range of issues which included the introduction of warning labels on alcoholic beverages, the establishment of a new National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee, and research into the effectiveness of law enforcement on the supply of illicit drugs.

Commenting on alcohol warning labels, the Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, stated "Alcohol consumption in Australia is seen as a socially acceptable practice, especially at this time of year when people celebrate the Christmas season. However what is often overlooked is the significant range of short and long term harms that alcohol has on individuals and the community. Given that alcohol kills more than 3,200 people and is responsible for over 43,000 hospital admissions each year it not only seems sensible but responsible to introduce warning labels on alcoholic beverages."

"Countries such as Japan and the USA already require warning labels on alcoholic beverages including imports from Australia. Other countries including Canada, France, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are taking similar steps. Surely it is time for Australia to follow this lead and make sure drinkers are reminded of the potential health risks of alcohol abuse."

Turning to Indigenous issues, Major Watters was pleased to announce that the ANCD has agreed to auspice the newly formed National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC). Major Watters stated, "Addressing Indigenous drug and alcohol issues are an ANCD priority. The formation of NIDAC will allow the ANCD to provide clear advice to government on these issues and ensure that they do not slip off the government's agenda. In particular, NIDAC would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Complementary National Drug Strategy for Indigenous People and recommending funding for new and innovative programs. We also hope to have it report regularly to the National Indigenous Council recently established by the Prime Minister."

Following presentations from the Australian Federal Police (AFP), ANCD members also acknowledged the efforts of the AFP to rigorously evaluate its performance. AFP Commissioner and Deputy ANCD Chairman, Mick Keelty, commented "AFP law enforcement activities, both in Australia and internationally are a critical component of Australia's integrated approach to reduce the supply and demand for, and harm caused by drugs. The AFP has worked hard to establish mechanisms to evaluate its performance. Indeed, mechanisms such as the AFP's Drug Harm Index indicate that in the 5 years leading up to June 2003 the AFP and its partners saved the Australian community approximately \$3.1 billion in harm through its disruption of illicit drug importations."

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The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.

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