

Launch of the Australian National Council on Drugs—March 1998

The Prime Minister, Hon John Howard's announcement of ANCD



Today, in Brisbane, I attended a special service of support for individuals and families suffering through illicit drug use. I was fortified in my determination to stem the flow of drugs into the country, educate our young people, and help those whose lives have been ruined by the cycle of drug dependency and associated crime.

At the service I was pleased to announce the membership of the new Australian National Council on Drugs. I was also pleased to announce the second instalment of my government's "Tough on Drugs" strategy worth in excess of \$100 million over four years. This is in addition to the \$87.5 million I announced in November 1997.

I have appointed Major Brian Watters as Chairman of the Australian National Council on Drugs. Major Brian Watters has 23 years experience as a Salvation Army Officer, primarily in the areas of drug and alcohol addiction. He is well placed to provide advice from the front line in our fight against drugs. The Deputy Chairman is Commissioner Mick Palmer of the Australian Federal Police. Commissioner Palmer has 30 years of law enforcement experience, and is highly regarded in international policing circles.

The new Council will ensure that the expert voice of non-government organisations and individuals working in the drug field reaches all levels of government and influences policy.

The Council will advise on licit and illicit drugs. Its first priority will be to advise on the development and implementation of the National Illicit Drug Strategy, including advice on the allocation of the funds I announced today and last November.

The Council has broad representation, including from volunteer and community organisations, law enforcement, education, health and social welfare interests. The Council members will bring their expertise and years of experience and commitment to the national effort to combat drugs.

This second instalment of more than \$100 million announced today builds on a balanced and integrated approach to reducing the supply of and demand for illicit drugs and minimising the harm they cause. This money targets each step in the drug chain from its importation and distribution, to its consumption. This includes additional funds to attack organised crime links with large scale heroin trafficking; new Australian Federal Police mobile strike teams in Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne; significantly more money for non-government organisation drug treatment facilities; and a community education and information campaign.

Today I have written to Premiers and Chief Ministers informing them about the new Council and my Government's second instalment on the Tough on Drugs strategy. I am looking to my State and Territory colleagues to throw their weight behind this strategy.

In 1996 there were 526 heroin related deaths in Australia. Eighty five percent of those deaths involved people who were not in treatment. Illicit drugs are associated with over 40,000 hospital bed days each year in Australia and a national turnover in excess of \$7 billion each year.

Research shows that more than half, and possibly up to 80% of property offences have some drug

involvement. Between 45% and 60% of convicted offenders committed property crimes to support drug habits. Some 64% of offenders admitted using drugs (to give them a lift, or courage) to commit an offence.

I am determined to confront this social and economic problem. We need this moral leadership for our children's sake.

16 March 1998