

National Council calls for a focus on families and support for needle exchange programs

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has signalled that it will be advising Governments that there is a need to improve support services for families affected by illicit drug use, and for there to be far greater linkages between needle exchanges, counselling, education and treatment services.

The ANCD, the peak non-government advisory body to Government on drug policy, has endorsed the need for all Governments to review the level of resources being directed towards family support, particularly in the areas of:

- preventing illicit drug use;
- supporting families with children affected by illicit drug use; and
- supporting families who have lost loved ones due to illicit drugs.

"There is no doubt that the family unit, particularly in the early stages of childhood, can play an integral role in preventing drug use amongst children and young people. Later, if the children are using drugs, these same family units also play a crucial role in minimising the potential harm that can result from illicit drug use", Major Watters, the Chairman of the Council, said today. He also added that "There is a need for all levels of Government in Australia to consider and support the role of families in addressing the drug problem."

"An increased focus on families makes sense. By supporting the family unit, the chances of young people developing dependencies is reduced. This is particularly true of chronic drug users, who often have a history of a difficult family life. The loss and grief felt by families who have lost loved ones to drug use are also a group that deserves a greater level of consideration and assistance from both the community and Government sectors."

The Council has also called for an expansion and enhancement of needle exchange services in Australia.

"The role of needle exchange programs in minimising the rate of HIV and other blood borne viral infections in Australia is well documented and acknowledged around the world. It is now time for all Governments to consider expanding the role of the needle exchange programs they have established to assist in increasing client access to treatment services"

"There is also a need for the needle exchange programs themselves to create greater linkages with treatment and support services. The needle exchange setting provides an invaluable opportunity to encourage people into treatment, counselling and support. We should make the most of this opportunity."

Major Watters also confirmed that the ANCD had discussed the World Health Organisation Report on the

Swiss Heroin Trial at its July meeting in Brisbane. Major Watters said "The Council is committed to looking at all initiatives that aim to reduce the harm associated with drug use. However, whilst the Council has not reached any conclusions on the value of heroin prescription programs it had noted the high level of psycho-social support provided by the Swiss Government for clients participating in the trial program." Major Watters added "the Council also has two members that were part of the World Health Organisation External Panel Evaluation of the Swiss Heroin Trial and so naturally all members, as experts in the drug and alcohol field, were interested in discussing the findings of the Panel"

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