

National Council calls for evidence based decisions in current drug debate

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The Australian National Council on Drugs, Chaired by Major Brian Watters, considered its position on supervised injecting facilities and the issue of Naltrexone being listed on the PBS, at its recent meeting in Adelaide.

The Council is still deliberating some of the complex issues surrounding supervised injecting facilities. We clearly recognise that illicit drugs must also be seen as a global problem. In order to foster further international cooperation, it is important that any trials of supervised injecting facilities do not breach our international obligations.

Major Watters stated, I wrote to the Premier of NSW in October advising him that the trial of the supervised injecting facility must be rigorously evaluated, in order to guide future action. If it can then be shown that supervised injecting facilities save lives, decrease infection rates and reduce a number of other harms to the individual, their families and the community, then the ANCD would support such an initiative. In effect, the ANCD would be supportive of any proven intervention that reduces drug use and related harm.

However, the Council has also discussed information that suggests that supervised injecting facilities may not be able to achieve some of these outcomes, particularly the reduction of overdose deaths, which are due to a combination of contributing factors.

On the issue of Naltrexone, the consensus opinion of the Council was that it was premature to make statements supporting the addition of any pharmacotherapy onto the PBS List for opioid dependence. Major Watters stated, the Council believes it is prudent to consider the outcome of all trials before making recommendations regarding individual treatments. For this reason, the Council welcomes the current trials of Naltrexone, and other pharmacotherapies such as Buprenorphine and LAAM. At this stage however, we believe it is too early to make an evidenced based decision.

All members of the ANCD are very concerned over the increasing number of heroin related overdose deaths. The Executive Officer of the ANCD, Mr Vumbaca stated, The Council is bringing together its considerable expertise to focus on what can be done in relation to the rising incidence of overdose deaths. In particular, the Council is keen to develop some practical strategies for governments and the public to consider.

16 December 1999

Further Inquiries to:

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12/18/2014

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