

National Drug Council meets in our nation's centre

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As part of its commitment to rural and regional areas, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has held its latest meeting in Alice Springs. The meeting included a community forum with local youth, youth services and drug and alcohol agencies, as well as a private meeting with the new Northern Territory Minister for Health, the Hon. Jane Aagard and some visits to remote communities by some members.

Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, said "ANCD members were made very aware of the difficulties facing young people, the services that work with them and drug and alcohol agencies in Alice Springs and its surrounds. Certainly, the ANCD will be supporting the new Government in their efforts to provide a broad range of appropriate services for communities, and has already begun this process with the new Minister for Health, whom I might add has encouraged us greatly with her determination to make a difference."

Major Watters added "The impact of alcohol on life in the Northern Territory is very concerning and the ANCD continues to be a strong advocate of progressive Northern Territory initiatives, such as the Living With Alcohol Program. This initiative has shown it can significantly reduce the harm from alcohol by instituting local programs that were funded from a few cents on each alcoholic drink sold in the Territory. Indeed, it is a program worthy of national implementation, especially given how it supports the efforts of local agencies in reducing the supply, demand and harm from alcohol in Australia."

The ANCD also discussed the range of issues facing rural and regional Australian and have committed to shortly releasing a report on the findings of its national consultation forums to key decision makers, including all politicians. The ANCD also committed to announcing a number of study grants for people working with drug and alcohol issues in rural and regional communities in the next 6 weeks.

Mr Gino Vumbaca, ANCD Executive Officer concluded by stating "The ANCD continues to demonstrate its commitment to listening and assisting all communities in Australia. The view of the Council was reinforced by those attending the Alice Springs forum that a whole of community and government approach is required to properly address drug and alcohol issues, including the support of local business".

The Council also took the opportunity to express its sorrow at the recent passing of Dr Arnold (Puggy) Hunter, who has been a driving force behind improving the health of Indigenous people, particularly in his role as Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organizations. His efforts have been invaluable and it is hoped his work will serve as a foundation for future achievements in Indigenous health.

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The Australian National Council on Drugs is the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy established by the Prime Minister in 1998.

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