

National announcement on heroin overdoses

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After a number of months of consultation and development, the Australian National Council on Drugs has today released its [position paper on heroin related overdoses](#). Chairman of the Council, Major Brian Watters, said that the importance of this discussion paper has been sadly accentuated by the recent spate of deaths in NSW & ACT and increasing number of ambulance call outs for overdoses.

Outlining a range of issues, the paper emphasises that in order to achieve any significant reduction in heroin related overdoses an integrated and comprehensive approach is essential.

Major Watters, in releasing the paper, said, "The Council has acknowledged the importance of addressing all aspects of drug use that includes reducing the number of young people initiating drug use, right through to improving the management of overdoses when they occur".

Further to increasing primary prevention efforts, the paper also calls for:

- increased availability of treatment services, including methadone and other drug substitution programs;
- greater understanding between police and paramedics in managing overdoses;
- greater education of drug users on safer practices, including the dangers of using combinations of drugs;
- increased support and education for families and friends of drug users;
- a willingness to investigate and trial innovative programs such as training users on resuscitation techniques, and assessing the value of increased availability of naloxone (narcane).

On the sensitive issue of supervised injecting rooms, the paper reinforces the Council's earlier statement that should they be trialed, the initiative be rigorously evaluated prior to any consideration of their continuance.

The members of the ANCD Executive Major Watters, Federal Police Commissioner Mick Palmer, Professors Ian Webster and Margaret Hamilton, stated, "Current estimates suggest that Australia may see a further increase in the number of deaths from heroin overdoses this year. The Council as the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy, is aware that the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy recently resolved to develop a National Heroin Overdose Strategy as a matter of urgency. In support of this resolution, the Council believes its position paper, which is consistent with advice from State and Territory expert committees and national drug and alcohol centers, provides a sound basis for the development of a National Strategy."

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