

## Our drugs workforce—value for money; but valued by the community?

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At its latest meeting in Perth, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) focussed its attention on workforce issues for the drug and alcohol sector.

Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, said “The ANCD has regularly voiced to the highest levels of government the need to support those working at the coal face of drug problems.”

During the Perth meeting, ANCD members held lengthy discussions on the issues of workforce development, including recognition of good performance, the need for improved terms and conditions of work, recruitment and retention, and training and skill development.

“I’m sure all Australians would agree that if their child or loved one needed to access these services, they’d want service from a highly professional, experienced and competent workforce. We have a good workforce, but we need to go beyond rhetoric and start to recognise and properly reward these people for the difficult work they are undertaking.” Major Watters added.

Professor Margaret Hamilton, an Executive member of the ANCD added “As someone who runs a range of drug and alcohol services in Victoria, I know that workforce development is a vitally important issue.”

“Whilst we can galvanize government support and funding for programs, we also need to be able to attract higher levels of community support for the programs, and the people involved in this work – maybe then we can also address why it is becoming more and more difficult to find people to do this work.” said Professor Hamilton.

Major Watters went on to say “The ANCD invited people from the drug and alcohol sector to a forum to hear about the main issues of concern in Perth and Western Australia. Once again, ANCD members were impressed by the level of informed debate within the Western Australian sector.”

“The forum reinforced for the ANCD that the drug and alcohol workforce is made up of a diverse blend of professions, experience and skills - but there remains a common goal to our work which is helping people work through their substance use problems in order to save and rebuild lives.”

Major Watters concluded “Stigma, stress and poor rates of pay are real issues for drug and alcohol workers.”

“We need to address those things to ensure we have the capacity to respond to the expectations of those seeking help, the community and the governments which fund services.”

A range of new projects were also discussed by ANCD members at the Perth meeting, which include initiatives aimed at workforce development issues, cannabis, and promoting the positive stories that come

from drug and alcohol treatment.

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*The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.*

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