


PDARN 2009 - The Network Continues to Expand Across the Pacific

- 14 July 2009

In July 2009, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) and Burnet Institute hosted the 4th Pacific Drug and Alcohol Research Network (PDARN) in Port Vila, Vanuatu. 

The meeting, which is annually funded by AusAID, the Department of Health & Ageing and the ANCD, was also supported this year by the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) and included representatives from 11 Pacific Island Countries, the UNODC, World Health Organisation, University of South Pacific, Fiji School of Medicine, Australian Institute of Criminology, University of NSW, Massey University, Auckland University, South Australian Drug & Alcohol Services Association, and Turning Point.

PDARN delegates welcomed the opportunity to once again share information on new drug and alcohol trends and issues at both the regional level and within individual Pacific Island Countries. The meeting also provided some capacity and skills building exercises, including participation in the UN Global SMART program, the WHO Assist Program and enhancement of social behavioural research skills.

As two of the Vanuatu delegates, Supt. Kelsin Bule from the Vanuatu Police Department, and Mr Jerry Iaruel from the Ministry of Health, said: "PDARN gives us a unique chance to share and learn with our Pacific colleagues. It also helps us to get drug and alcohol misuse on the agenda in the region, and this is very important if we are to get good research to improve our local policies and practices."

PDARN delegates were also honored to have the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Mr Edward Natapei and the Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Mr Pablo Kang address delegates at their official dinner. Having such prominent people speak with the delegates was seen to be a real demonstration of Australian and Pacific Island commitment to address the drug and alcohol issues affecting the region. The PDARN delegates also took this opportunity with the Prime Minister & High Commissioner to state their hope that drug and alcohol issues will be discussed at the upcoming Pacific Island Leaders Forum to be held in Cairns next month.

Some of the key findings from the PDARN 2009 meeting included:

- The need for greater levels of quality and comparable data across the region
- The lack of investment in research
- The lack of investment in effective treatment services;
- The growing concern across the Pacific at the rate of social change and the impact this was having on communities, particularly young people that were experiencing high levels of unemployment, suicide and pregnancy;
- The over reliance on prevention messages to reduce drug misuse;
- The increasing promotion, availability and misuse of alcohol, including 'homebrew';
- The high rates of alcohol related harm across the Pacific – such as road trauma and domestic violence;
- The increasing use and availability of cannabis, particularly with other substances;

A full report on the meeting will be available in coming weeks on the PDARN

website <http://www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=8327>

A Pacific Situational Regional Assessment of Drug & Alcohol Patterns and Trends commissioned by the ANCD Asia-Pacific Drug Issues Committee with funding from AusAID and the Department of Health & Ageing, and undertaken by the Burnet Institute will also be released in coming months and available on the ANCD website www.ancd.org.au

PDARN Background Information:

PDARN was established in 2005 and aims to identify and explore opportunities for collaboration between health, law enforcement and social research personnel across the Pacific on drugs and alcohol issues facing Pacific island countries, and to make policy recommendations to individual governments.

The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues and includes a diverse range of experts from health, law enforcement, treatment, education, research and non-government sectors.

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