


PDARN 2010 - A Successful and Significant Pacific meeting - 9 September 2010

In July 2010, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) and the Burnet Institute hosted the 5th Pacific Drug and Alcohol Research Network (PDARN) meeting in Port Vila, Vanuatu. 

PDARN is the only research and information network in the Pacific region with a specific focus on substance use and related issues. The network provides a unique opportunity for Pacific Island Countries and Territories to exchange information on these significant public health issues.

The annual meeting, officially opened by the Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Mr Pablo Kang, is funded by AusAID, the Department of Health & Ageing and the ANCD. The meeting was also supported, as in previous years, by the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme. Representatives from 11 Pacific Island Countries and Territories, the South Pacific Secretariat, the University of South Pacific, as well as meeting sponsors and supporters participated in the meeting.

Once again, PDARN delegates welcomed the opportunity to 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 an opportunity for participants to discuss the global alcohol policy trends and issues with one of the world's leading experts in this area, Prof Sally Casswell of Massey University, New Zealand. The issue of alcohol and its adverse health, social and economic impact on Pacific Island communities was an area of discussion throughout the meeting. The meeting also explored the relative influence of the alcohol industry in comparison to the influence of public health advocates.

Delegates also had the opportunity to examine the issue of increasing the participation of young people in drug and alcohol policy development with Ms Anna Jacob of Auckland City Council. Anna described some highly respected innovative approaches to achieving this goal.

Delegates also developed drug and alcohol research project concepts that could specifically address some of the areas of need identified at the meeting. These included: a multi-country study on the impact and effects of 'home brew' alcohol – expected to be undertaken by PDARN delegates in the coming year; a comprehensive cannabis survey across the region, for which external funding will be sought; a rapid situational assessment for the Solomon Islands; and a project to assist countries to undertake better drug and alcohol data collection. The opportunities now available through a New Zealand funded international alcohol control study program were also discussed.

Delegates also spent some time to visit, and praise the efforts of, a local Vanuatu NGO - 'Won Smol Bag' – for the way it provides a wide range of culturally appropriate health and educational services for young people in Port Vila.

A welcome announcement was also made at the meeting by the Department of Health & Ageing and AusAID to provide funding for a 2011 PDARN meeting, as well as resources for the development of a stand-alone PDARN website to enhance communication and the dissemination of drug and alcohol information, both

within the region and beyond.

Some of the key findings from the PDARN 2010 meeting included:

- The growing concern over the lack of regulation to address harmful alcohol licensing and marketing issues across the region;
- The potential link between alcohol intoxication, unsafe sexual activity, sexually transmitted infections and HIV;
- The continued lack of investment in effective treatment services;
- The increasing level of Pacific based research available, particularly through the University of South Pacific;
- The need for a more co-ordinated approach in Pacific Island Countries and Territories to collecting and collating data on substance use related information;
- The need for a greater level of partnership between health and law enforcement officials in addressing substance use problems;
- The need for a greater understanding of the availability and use of cannabis, particularly with other substances;
- The vulnerability of Pacific Island Countries and Territories to the trafficking of drugs, particularly amphetamine-type stimulants, due to the region's geographical proximity to illicit drug manufacturing centres in South-East Asia;

A full report on the 2010 meeting will be available in coming weeks. Other information on PDARN and the 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 available on the Asia Pacific Committee Section of the [ANCD Website](#)

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 Territories, and to make policy recommendations to individual governments.

The ANCD is the principal advisory body to the Prime Minister and 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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Further Information:

1. The United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime Global SMART seeks to enhance the capacity of Governments to generate, manage, analyse and report drug-related information.

Some related links:

<http://www.unodc.org/eastasiaandpacific/en/smart.html>

http://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/SMART_A5_4p_WEB.pdf

2. Social Policy, Social Welfare Systems and Human Security in the Pacific Conference

The University of the South Pacific, 5th to 7th October 2010

School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts & Law - Laucala Campus

The conference is aimed at identifying and mapping social policies as they relate to social and cultural protection and human security in the Pacific. The particular focus is on social welfare systems and the social policies and law that governments, non-government organizations (NGOs) and faith and community-based organizations, private sector organizations and International Development Agencies, particularly UN agencies, need to work with to strengthen and support existing welfare systems. There is an array of social policies that deal with social and cultural protection and human security issues – human rights, disaster management and humanitarian law, HIV/AIDs, child protection, social protection through welfare, restorative justice, sexual and gender-based violence, disability, juvenile justice, family law, mental health, sexual reproduction, labour and unemployment, micro-finance, cultural heritage and linguistic rights and protection, and ecological justice to list a few. The challenge for countries in the Pacific region is to enhance the provision of quality basic protection and social welfare services. It is recognized that effective “protection” requires:

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 1. Accessible, affordable and well-managed social welfare and protection services;
 2. Inclusive and evidence based policies and plans guiding such services.

The *Expected Outcomes* of this conference are:

- - Assessment and analysis of existing social protection policy, systems, services, delivery mechanisms, capacity and training, reflecting the situation in the Pacific;
 - Development of a network of Pacific social policy makers and implementers;
 - Identification of further capacity building opportunities for organizations and personnel involved in social policy, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and;
 - Publication of country reports and conference papers in possible collaboration with Pacific Legal Information Institute (PacLII).

The Conference will provide a forum where a Pacific situation analysis will be undertaken with the overall objective being to assess and analyze existing policies, services, and delivery mechanisms for social protection and social welfare in the PICs and to recommend workable, sustainable models and good practices, taking into account the social and cultural context (as well as, socio-economic condition and established traditions etc).

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