

Parliamentary forum discusses justice and drugs—16 October 2008

Australian National Council on Drugs and Mental Health Council of Australia — joint media release



Ministers, Members of Parliament, the Australian Federal Police and representatives of the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors met at Parliament House this morning to discuss critical issues relating to the justice system and drug and alcohol use in Australia.

Speakers at the breakfast included Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Bob Debus MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens, AFP Commissioner and ANCD Deputy Chair Mick Keelty, and Mental Health Council CEO David Crosbie.

Minister Debus highlighted the importance of demand reduction in addressing drug use problems and in particular raised the Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative (IDDI) and its success in diverting people from the criminal justice system into treatment. The Minister added “Diversion is a worthwhile investment to move users into rehabilitation and therefore break the cycle of drug use”.

Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, highlighted the important partnership that exists between health and law enforcement to effectively address drug use problems in Australia. In particular she noted the importance of non government organisations within the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors and the essential services they provide.

AFP Commissioner Keelty also emphasised diversion in his presentation, and spoke of its importance in the rehabilitation of young people who commit drug-related crimes. In highlighting the success of Australia’s supply reduction initiatives Commissioner Keelty also promoted the need to address the demand and harm from drug use as a necessary component of any effective and comprehensive drug strategy.

Mental Health Council CEO, David Crosbie highlighted the role of police in managing mental health and drug and alcohol issues, arguing that, “Police are often at the frontline in mental health and alcohol and drug problems, it is police who attend when other services are unavailable. With this in mind it is worth noting that we don’t necessarily give police and magistrates the tools they need to help people in our community”.

Facilitated by Mr Gino Vumbaca, Executive Director of the ANCD, a panel of experts that included ANCD Chairman Dr John Herron, Professor Margaret Hamilton and Associate Professor Robert Ali took questions from attendees. Issues such as Australia’s National Drug Strategy, international and regional engagement on drug issues and the use of the death penalty for drug offenders in some countries were discussed.

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