

ANCD drug forum: public liability insurance threatening services

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has heard the concerns of drug and alcohol workers about the possibility of service closures at a forum held in Sydney last week.

Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, said “The ANCD is very concerned over the impact of both the difficulties in securing insurance for services, as well as the extraordinarily huge increases in public liability insurance premiums, on the future of drug and alcohol services. Agencies need insurance to operate and others cannot sustain such overwhelmingly high premium costs – either way, without insurance, many of these agencies will not be eligible to receive funding. This situation will of course further disadvantage people struggling to overcome their addictions, in a sector that is already stretched to keep up with demand. The ANCD has in fact recently written to Senator Helen Coonan, Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, about this very issue.”

The forum, attended by approximately 80 people, was followed by a two day meeting, with a number of national drug policy issues were discussed including alcohol taxation. The meeting also included a discussion with the Hon. Trish Worth, Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ms Jane Halton, Secretary, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Major Watters said, “Council members were very pleased to be able to discuss a number of issues with the Hon. Trish Worth and Jane Halton. The ANCD certainly appreciates its responsibility, and the opportunity to directly raise the concerns of the drug and alcohol sector and a range of national drug policy issues with those charged with the responsibility for these portfolios. The Council is confident that it has the full support of Ms Worth and Ms Halton and is looking forward to some very positive outcomes in the near future”.

ANCD Executive Officer, Mr Vumbaca added, “Alcohol taxation is a subject about which the Council has been very vocal, and it is the ANCD’s view that real opportunities to improve the current system exist. Making the right changes to the tax system that applies to alcohol can have measurable impacts on health, as well as economic benefits, and the Council will continue to make strong representations to Government on this matter.”

Major Watters concluded, “The ANCD will be releasing more of its research papers over the coming months, and we have also been working hard on a number of other issues, including a submission on Indigenous issues in Cape York. The ANCD is committed to fulfilling its role in providing advice to Government and the ANCD will continue to make documents available for the public to access through its Internet site.”

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The Australian National Council on Drugs is the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy established by the Prime Minister in 1998.

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