

Budget bonus for drugs: psych, speed and the bush given priority

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Major Brian Watters, Chairman of the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) said “I am very pleased that the ANCD has been able to obtain budgetary support from senior members of the Government for areas of high need. In particular it is pleasing to see funds going to assist those with substance use and mental health problems, to address drug issues in rural and regional communities, to tackle the growing problem of psycho-stimulants, and for research.”

The 2003 Federal Budget confirmed that previous Tough on Drugs funding has been continued for family, schools and needle and syringe programs:

Strengthening Families Initiative	\$3.2 million
School Drug Education	\$5.3 million
Australian Drug Information Network	\$1.2 million
Needle & Syringe Programs	\$38.6 million

In addition funding has been allocated to a number of new initiatives:

Co-morbidity Initiative	\$4.4 million
Rural & Regional Initiative	\$4.0 million
Psycho-stimulants Initiative	\$2.0 million
Drug & Alcohol Research Fund	\$2.8 million

Reacting to the release of the budget, the ANCD noted that the work conducted by the Council has enabled it to provide specific advice on a number of drug and alcohol issues, which is reflected in yesterday’s budget announcements.

Continuing, Major Watters stated, “The Council has held a number of Co-morbidity Workshops and consultations in rural and regional locations to enhance its advice on the drug and alcohol issues faced by these communities. Similarly, the ANCD has given considerable attention to the issue of psycho-stimulants and has encouraged governments to provide specific funding for this important and emerging international problem.”

Professor Hamilton, Director of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre & Executive ANCD member added, "The dedication of funds for research into drug and alcohol issues is vitally important. Research provides the evidence-base for improved drug policy and enables advancements to be made in prevention and treatment practice. The announcement in the budget of a dedicated research fund for drug and alcohol issues will be welcomed by the sector."

The ANCD further welcomed the commitment of \$53 million in initiatives to reduce the availability of drugs in our communities, including \$12 million for new programs.

On a related issue the ongoing commitment of the Federal Government to fund hepatitis C strategies (\$15.9 million) was also seen as an important issue by the ANCD, given the number of past and current drug users affected by the disease.

In summing up their view, the ANCD Executive (Major Watters, AFP Commissioner Keelty, Professor Hamilton, Mr Popple and Mr Wilson) agreed that "In light of the current budget pressures, it is very pleasing to see the continuance of this Government's commitment to funding ongoing initiatives that have worked, as well as funding new initiatives that further aim to reduce the supply of drugs, the demand for drugs and the harm caused by drugs"

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

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