

Communique - February 2009

The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) is the principal advisory body to the Government on drug policy and plays a critical role in ensuring the voice of the community is heard in relation to drug related policies and strategies. 

The ANCD consists of representatives from the non government and government drug and alcohol and related sectors (treatment, research, law enforcement, education etc) from around Australia.

Council meetings and consultations with people working with drug and alcohol issues are held in a different State or Territory every three months. Through these meetings and consultation forums, the ANCD is able to ensure that the views of the sector, in particular non-government, community-based organisations are considered as part of drug policy advice.

In February 2009 in Canberra the ANCD:

- held a consultation forum with agencies working with drug and alcohol related matters where informative presentations were received from Ms Helene Delaney (ACT Health Department), Ms Jacky Cook (NGO Representative) and from Mr David Templeman (ADCA the national peak AOD NGO body)
- conducted its regular quarterly meeting with presentations from:
 - Ms Joanne Cassar — National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre;
 - Ms Nicole Wiggins — Manager of CAHMA;
- met with a number of Federal Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, Senators and other Members of Parliament to discuss a range of national and international drug and alcohol issues.

AOD Consultation Forum:

The forum was attended by over 50 people with a number of issues being raised for discussion and debate. Specifically these issues included:

- The need to recognise that prisons can provide an opportunity for innovation in how we address substance misuse problems;
- The importance of ensuring that the drug driving testing programs currently in place around the country also rigorously evaluate their testing integrity and broader effectiveness, particularly given the resources being allocated and the potential impact on people's lives;
- The need to effectively address some of the different types and nature of drug use in Australia amongst more recent migrant communities;
- The importance of setting illicit drug policies in a manner that does not increase difficulties in access for those people seeking relief from pain with prescription based opiates;
- The need for Australia's next national drug strategy to address issues of workforce development, prevention and research;
- The importance of consumer involvement in the development and management of drug treatment and harm reduction services;
- Congratulating the ACT Government on the development of a new Indigenous specific drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation facility in Canberra;

ANCD Meeting:

The ANCD discussed and debated a number of issues at its meeting which included agreements that:

- Current drug driving testing regimes need to be critically examined and evaluated to ensure their validity and public confidence in their important prevention and deterrence effects;
- The current 'alcopops' taxation debate needed to refocus on the importance of the Federal Government taking a first step to using price as part of a much more important platform of wider reform to alcohol pricing and policy in Australia;
- Consideration be given to establishing a requirement for information on any Australian based and commissioned research to be accessible at the time of its commencement; and for any research results and data to be easily accessible to research and wider sectors upon completion;
- Consideration be given to address the ongoing anxiety in the NGO sector about the impact of new health care funding arrangements for drug and alcohol services previously funded under Special Purpose Payments from the Federal Government to the States & Territories;
- Australia significantly increase its engagement with illicit drug issues affecting the region, with a specific emphasis on demand and harm reduction assistance to complement its efforts in supply reduction assistance and co-operation;
- Cannabis potency data be regularly collected and collated across Australia;
- Greater consideration be given to the increasing research and anecdotally based evidence of heroin availability and associated problems increasing in Australia;
- Any response to the increasing number of opiate based pharmaceutical prescriptions be carefully considered and developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders to avoid potential unintentional negative consequences;
- Consideration be given to the need for a new national approach to addressing substance misuse issues facing Indigenous people including new and significant increased investment in treatment services;
- More needs to be done to ensure that the range of treatment and harm reduction services available in the community are also available in prisons across Australia;
- The next National Drug Strategy undergo a consultation process to include the views of people from a broad range of sectors that work with AOD issues including NGOs, GPs, police etc;
- The upcoming Commission on Narcotic Drugs meeting and its 10 year review of the 1998 UN's General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in Vienna presented a real opportunity to amend the current treaties to reflect the importance of demand and harm reduction strategies, as well as supply reduction strategies. The members also acknowledged the important contributions to be made at this meeting by Prof Margaret Hamilton and Prof Richard Mattick as part of the official Australian Delegation.
- Strong support be given to the 1st National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Conference to be held in Adelaide in 2010.

Report Launches

- In the 2nd Quarter of 2009, the commissioned report on *NGO sustainability in the AOD sector*, as well as the findings of its recent survey of NGOs on compliance issues;
- In the 2nd Quarter of 2009, the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) Position Paper on *reducing incarceration of Indigenous people*;
- In the 3rd Quarter of 2009, the commissioned report on *opioid pharmacotherapy* in Australia.

Next Meeting

The next ANCD meeting will be in Brisbane on the 21st – 22nd of May where a consultation forum will also be held with agencies on the Thursday the 21st of May (9:00 am – 11:00 am).

More information on the Australian National Council on Drugs is available by accessing the ANCD website: www.ancd.org.au or by contacting Mr Gino Vumbaca, Executive Director of the ANCD on 02 6166 9600 or 0408 244 552