

## Communique - February 2013

The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) is the principal advisory body to the Prime Minister and Federal Government on drug and alcohol policy and plays a critical role in ensuring the views of the many sectors involved in addressing drug and alcohol problems, as well as the community, is heard. 

The ANCD membership for the 2011-2014 term was announced in 2011 by the Prime Minister and includes people from both the non government and government drug, alcohol and related sectors including treatment, medicine, research, law enforcement, Indigenous health, local government, education, mental health, consumers, and the magistracy from around Australia.

The full membership can be found at: [ANCD Members](#)

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### ANCD Consultation Forum

The ANCD met in Brisbane in February 2013. This meeting was preceded by a consultation forum with people who work to address drug and alcohol issues. The forum was attended by over 100 people and included presentations from Mr Ben Norris (Mental Health and AOD Branch, Queensland Health), Ms Rebecca MacBean (Executive Officer, Queensland Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies [QNADA]) and Ms Nicky Parry (Queensland Intravenous and AIDS Association [QuIVAA]).

Matters discussed during the forum included:

- A detailed focus on the breadth and depth of the recent funding cuts to the sector and the restructuring of government departments.
- There were many reports that these changes were adversely affecting the AOD sector's ability to meet the demand of communities to assist and treat people seeking help with drug and alcohol problems. The changes were also seen across housing, employment, and other welfare sectors, with the result that the highest impact is strongly perceived to be falling on the most vulnerable people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AOD related services and the communities they serve were particularly raised as having borne the brunt of significant funding reductions.
- Despite research demonstrating that Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (GLBTI) people and communities can have higher rates of hazardous substance use there continues, both in Queensland and nationally, to be a lack of access to appropriate specialised services and a need to ensure mainstream services are equipped to respond to related needs.
- Concern was expressed over the lack of investment in prevention efforts compared to the investment in tertiary treatment such as AOD related surgical services; and in this regard that governments reconsider alcohol taxation reform as an appropriate and sustainable source of additional funding for prevention programs.

- There was also concern that the AOD sector may be subsumed within mental health and discussion of the importance of recognising AOD as a specialist service sector.
- Concern was expressed at new funding agreements which prevent people working at services that receive more than 50% of their funding from the government from making statements contrary to government policy, taking an advocacy position or even linking their websites to other services which do so.
- The current liquor licensing reforms in Queensland and the liquor licensing review and the importance of taking into account community views and evidence on alcohol related harm.
- The dismay at the ceasing of many drug and alcohol diversion programs in Queensland, despite the wealth of evidence of their success and positive impact on community safety and wellbeing.
- Increases in the number of people who use steroids and image enhancing drugs accessing NSPs, and the naivety of this population as to the health risks of injecting. It was noted that while experienced in Queensland it was also occurring in other jurisdictions.
- The long pharmacotherapy waiting lists that exist in Queensland, which indicate the need for far more pharmacotherapy places to be funded. A centralised waiting list to enable support of people on the list was proposed.
- Questions were raised about the lack of pharmacotherapy programs available in Queensland correctional centres and the rationale behind not making a valuable treatment available given the histories of drug use of many prisoners.
- The importance of consumer participation in developing and delivering services; which tends to occur less in Queensland than in some other jurisdictions.
- The importance of access to services for people with drug and alcohol related disabilities under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.
- The need for, and opportunities related to, greater Federal and jurisdictional cooperation with regard to healthcare reforms, noting that the Medicare Local and Hospital and Health Service boundaries in Queensland do not overlap.

## ANCD Meeting

The ANCD discussed and determined a course of action on a number of matters at its meeting. These included:

- ANCD support for the NGO treatment grants and sector review, including the importance of both the Federal and State governments working together in supporting the aims of the sector.
- Concern at issues surrounding employment assistance services for AOD clients. The ANCD is currently working with other sectors to develop a response to these issues for Federal Government consideration.
- Challenges relating to the availability of alcohol at schools and school functions. The ANCD plans to work

with schools regarding ways to set cultural norms relating to alcohol that are appropriate in the school environment.

- The ANCD's continuing work on needle and syringe programs, such as addressing the increasing numbers of new and often naive drug users (and those using image enhancing drugs) accessing these services and that NSPs are an important part of the sector's response to changing drug use trends.
- Mandatory treatment and the need for the ANCD to prepare a paper on issues surrounding this topic; including its evidence base and the best principles surrounding its use.
- Two presentations:
  - Ms Carrie Fowlie on the ACT naloxone program and prison NSP trial. The presentation provided information on the introduction of the naloxone program, and feedback obtained so far; and discussed the ongoing work being undertaken by the ACT Government and ACT based health and consumer groups on the introduction of the prison NSP trial at the Alexander Maconochie Centre in the ACT.
  - Dr Nicholas Carah on social media and AOD issues. The discussion focused on the use of Facebook by alcohol companies and the integration of social media with drinking rituals and promotion. Dr Carah's research on the use of social media by Hello Sunday Morning was also outlined.
- The current work of the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC), including the recent launch of its reports *An Economic Analysis for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Offenders: Prisons vs Residential Treatment* and *Bridges and Barriers: Addressing Indigenous Incarceration and Health* (revised edition). The economic analysis provides further evidence for the ANCD's support for voluntary, community-based treatment over incarceration.
- The current work of the Asia-Pacific Drug Issues Committee (APDIC), including their continuing work towards co-hosting with UN agencies a third roundtable on compulsory treatment in the region, following the satisfactory conclusion to the second roundtable.
- The continuing informative work of *Of Substance* magazine, including the new issue due out in March with articles on hepatitis C and alcohol free fundraising months.
- Members also congratulated and thanked Health Minister Plibersek on her announcement of two new important additional medications for the treatment of hepatitis C under the PBS.
- The critical importance of maintaining access to services and prevention efforts. Concern was expressed at the depth of the impact of funding cuts in Queensland on clients and on the sector. In response to a number of concerns raised at the forum, members:
  - noted the evidence supporting the effectiveness of diversion for reducing costs and incarceration levels and that there is a need for continuing government commitment to diversion programs.
  - expressed concern over the potential stifling of debate in and contribution from the sector as a result of funding rules prohibiting statements contrary to government policy. Such rules are at odds with the social inclusion agenda and the National Compact, and the ANCD notes the importance of robust

debate as a way of advancing public health, and the need for the community, consumers, and service providers to be able to participate in such debates.

- discussed the need for evidence and information to be the driver of any changes to the delivery of services; in particular the need to collect data on services prior, during and after undergoing any processes of reform and change, to enable adequate planning, evaluation, quality assurance and intelligence-led public health and policing.

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As previously agreed with the Prime Minister, the ANCD will provide a report on the outcomes and discussions of each ANCD meeting. The next meeting of the ANCD, which will include a consultation forum, will take place in June 2013.

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Further information on the ANCD's work and activities can be found on the ANCD websites:

[Australian National Council on Drugs](#)

[National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee](#)

[Of Substance & Jobs of Substance](#)

[Asia Pacific Drug Issues Committee](#)

[Positive Stories](#)

***For any further details on this communiqué please contact the ANCD Secretariat on or (02) 6166 9600***