

Communique - June 2008

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 June 2008 in Perth the ANCD:

- received informative presentations from the WA Health Department and from the Non-Government Organisation Alcohol & Other Drug peak body – WANADA;
- held a consultation forum with agencies working with drug and alcohol related matters; and
- conducted its regular quarterly meeting with presentations from:
 - A/Prof Simon Lenton – NDRI (on IRDS, EDRS & Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme in WA);
 - Ms Sandra Fox – WASUA (on consumer issues); and
 - Ms Wendy Casey – Indigenous AOD Workforce Development.

As a result, the following issues have been highlighted by ANCD members for this communiqué:

AOD Consultation Forum:

The forum was attended by over 80 people with a number of issues being raised for discussion and debate. Specifically there was concern over:

- The current lack of certainty on continued Federal Government funding beyond June 2008 for drug and alcohol programs, and the dramatic impact this is having on the NGO and government drug and alcohol service sectors;
- Salaries in the sector not being adequate enough for employers to retain their staff;
- Indigenous incarceration rates – Western Australia was described as having the highest rates of Indigenous incarceration in the country with a situation that appears not to be improving;
- Due to the geographical size of Western Australia and the spread of its population, remoteness is a concern for services as is the overall lack of access to services. This concern does not specifically relates to the indigenous population only;
- Alcohol use amongst young people (including underage drinkers) and the potential of raising the drinking age, although there was debate on the merit of this measure;
- The need to also focus on urban Indigenous populations whom are suffering from a lack of availability of comprehensive services;
- The need for drug and alcohol services to be more attuned to the needs of specific cultural groups such as gay and lesbian communities;
- Concern was raised on the introduction of income management of welfare payments and the impact this

may have on marginalised people in some communities if not managed appropriately; and

- Concern was expressed around the lack of diagnostic and other services available in relation to foetal alcohol spectrum disorder issues.

ANCD Meeting:

Alcohol Intoxication

As a part of an effort to more thoroughly understand the issues associated with the community concern on the levels of alcohol related harm, the ANCD has decided to commission a piece of research regarding alcohol intoxication.

The timing of this work relates to both the upcoming ending of the current National Alcohol Strategy (2006-2009) and the interest and concern in the community reflected in public policy debate and government attention. In this context the ANCD is committed to commissioning this work and completing the project in one year.

NIDAC Conference

As part of updating on a range of NIDAC activities it was noted that NIDAC has progressed its planning for the first National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Conference. This conference is proposed for 2009 and aims to provide a national forum where people can share knowledge, develop networks and access data on Indigenous drug and alcohol issues.

Additionally, the importance of Indigenous evidence-based interventions and appropriate accredited training was discussed along with the need to build capacity through evidence-based information.

Health Care Agreements

On the 30 April 2008, the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) presented the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, with a Report on the framework for the next Australian Health Care Agreements. 'Beyond the Blame Game: Accountability and performance benchmarks for the next Australian Health Care Agreements' represents the Commission's views on key issues to be addressed in the Agreements and proposes robust and relevant performance indicators and benchmarks.

The ANCD welcomes the report and the philosophy and principles that underpin the work of the NHHRC. The ANCD was also pleased to see this process providing transparency within the health care agreements, and particularly pleased to see that its submission to the NHHRC had led to the listing of an alcohol and drug key benchmark in the proposed agreements.

Early Warning System

Based on information received and discussed at the Perth meeting and at previous ANCD meetings, the ANCD recognises the importance of establishing an appropriate national early warning system for front-line public health and law enforcement staff involved in drug and alcohol work, as well as the wider public, in some

cases. The ANCD Executive undertook to raise this matter for Federal Government consideration.

Asia-Pacific Issues

Members received an update on the Pacific Drug & Alcohol Research Network (PDARN) meeting that will take place in early July in Fiji. Members noted and supported the strong representation of Pacific countries at the meeting along with a range of national and international organisations. The meeting is supported by the Department of Health & Ageing and will include AusAID, Attorney Generals' Department and Pacific Police Chief representatives.

National Corrections Drug Strategy 2006-2009

The National Corrections Drug Strategy 2006–2009 was recently endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy and can be viewed and downloaded from the ANCD website (www.ancd.org.au). This document is a significant milestone, and provides insight into the difficulty faced by correctional services with both alcohol and other drug issues and mental health problems. The ANCD is encouraged that there will be some real focus on these issues within the corrections sector.

'Of Substance' Update

'Of Substance' is an ANCD initiative and is produced with funding from the Department of Health and Ageing. 'Of Substance' is a free, quarterly magazine. The next edition will be out in July 2008. There are currently over 16,000 copies of the magazine in circulation each quarter with a recent independent evaluation highlighting that there were over 30,000 readers of the magazine. The Of Substance website www.ofsubstance.org.au provides access to all copies of the magazine and article search facilities.

Drug Action Week

The ANCD also expressed their strong support for Drug Action Week and its culmination at the National Drug & Alcohol Awards in Melbourne on Friday the 27th of June.

Next Meeting

Members were informed that the next meeting will be in Adelaide from the 4th – 5th of September 2008 where a consultation forum will also be held with agencies on the Thursday the 4th of September (9:00am – 11:00am).

Conclusion

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