


## Communique - November 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 November 2008 in Melbourne the ANCD:

- received informative presentations from Mr Paul Smith (Victorian Human Services Department), Mr Sam Biondo (VAADA the Victorian peak AOD NGO body) and from Ms Anne Malloch (Melbourne City Council)
- held a consultation forum with agencies working with drug and alcohol related matters;
- conducted its regular quarterly meeting with presentations from:
  - Mr Fabian Kong & Mr Brendan Quinn — Burnet Institute;
  - Mr Damon Brogan — VIVAIDS;
  - A/Supt Craig Howard — Victoria Police;
  - Dr Rob Knowles — National Hospitals & Health Care Reform Commission.

### AOD Consultation Forum:

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

- The need for a greater level of focus, including research and programs, to address substance misuse issues affecting recently arrived communities in Australia;
- The increased level of anxiety in the sector, as well as in the mental health and communicable diseases sectors, on the upcoming changed funding arrangements that will see a greater level of health program funding flexibility given to State and Territory governments by the Federal government;
- The current lack of certainty surrounding Federal Government funding for the non-government organisation (NGO) and the dramatic impact this is having on service delivery, as well as staff recruitment and retention within the NGO sector;
- The lack of drug treatment based residential rehabilitation services available across Victoria;
- The need for a campaign that aims to reduce the stigma associated with those with substance misuse problems and the improvements in individual, family and community life from treatment – similar to the positive campaigns that have occurred in the mental health and other sectors;
- The need to recognise the prevalence of polydrug use in the community which makes focusing on specific drugs outdated — the importance of treating people rather than substances;
- The need for a greater focus on the levels of family violence associated with substance misuse;
- The importance of consumer representation on various organisations and agencies addressing substance misuse — it is an area that the sector has not embraced appropriately.

## **ANCD Meeting:**

### **Health Funding Arrangements**

The ANCD discussed the concerns raised in the forum regarding the increased funding flexibility for jurisdictional governments on health issues via the significant reduction in the number of Specific Purpose Payments made by the Commonwealth. Accordingly, members agreed to write to the Minister to advise her of these concerns and the need to ensure that a commitment to funding of drug, alcohol and associated programs is continued particularly for the non-government sector.

### **ANCD 2008–09 Federal Budget Submission**

As has occurred annually since its inception in 1998 the ANCD has finalised a Federal Budget submission for the consideration of the Prime Minister and his Ministers. As has also occurred in the past the submission will focus on initiatives to meet the needs of the broader community and all sectors involved in addressing drug and alcohol issues.

### **Emerging Issues**

As occurs at every ANCD meeting, the members reviewed a number of recent research and other reports. The need to maintain a strong focus on emerging drug issues, particularly in the illicit drug arena and the correctional system was highlighted by members.

### **Presentation by Victorian Police**

A presentation was made to the ANCD by Acting Superintendent Craig Howard of the Victoria Police, Crime Department Strategy Group who with colleagues has been involved with a project developing a Drug Harm Index & Attribution model. This model draws information from a broad number of data sets including law enforcement & ABS data, which is then used to determine the harm caused to communities by illicit drugs & the flow on affects like crimes committed. This model will then allow local police managers to direct police resources & allow stronger tasking & coordination of policing activities.

### **National Health & Hospitals Reform Commission & National Preventative Health**

#### **Taskforce**

The members received presentations and correspondence from both the NHHRC & NPHT and welcomed their consultative and informed approach to improve the health of Australians and simplify compliance measures. The members did express their support for both organisations implementing their important agendas.

### **Alcohol Issues**

The members expressed their support for the current Federal Government campaign to address binge

drinking. The need for a sustained campaign in combination with a range of other measures was also supported by members. In noting the current debate on the 'alcopop' taxation change the ANCD called on all parties to support this measure as a vital step to both review alcohol taxation more broadly and to ensure funding of a range of preventative health initiatives.

## **Social Inclusion & National Compact**

The ANCD discussed the National Compact Expert Panel and the significant implications for the NGO sector from this important social inclusion initiative. Although the ANCD had already provided a number of reports to the Expert Panel, it will continue to be involved with its work as well as liaise with the Ministers responsible for this important area. The members also highlighted the need to maintain an involvement in the issues affecting people experiencing homelessness and will work with key partners in the sector in 2009 to further improve the resources and services for this 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. An update was provided by Dr Young and Professor Makkai. The January edition is currently at the printers and focuses on the role of local government. The distribution of the magazine continues to grow substantially with a readership of over 33,000 people in health, education, law enforcement and policy areas. The increased subscriptions from police and schools was noted by the members

## **Recent Activity and Reports**

ANCD members approved and finalised the following initiatives:

- Launch of the report "Sustainability, Governance and Funding of Non-Government Organisations in the Alcohol and Other Drugs Sector: Issues and options for enhancement" to be held in late February, early March.
- Conducting of a survey of NGOs on reporting requirements and issues.

## **Next Meeting**

Members were informed that the next meeting will be in Canberra from the 25th – 27th of February where a consultation forum will also be held with agencies on the Friday the 27th of February (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](http://www.ancd.org.au) or by contacting Mr Gino Vumbaca, Executive Director of the ANCD on 02 6166 9600 or 0408 244 552

The ANCD members including National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) Chair, A/Prof Ted Wilkes, also wished to thank and acknowledge the Federal Government's commitment to Indigenous issues in

2008 and it's focus on improving the lives of Indigenous people. It has been a remarkable year of increased promise and hope for Indigenous people.