


Communique - November 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 many sectors involved, as well as the community, is heard in relation to drug related policies and strategies. 

The ANCD consists of members 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 2009 in Hobart the ANCD:

- With 30-40 representatives of the NGO and government alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector were guests at a civic reception hosted by Lord Mayor Rob Valentine of Hobart City Council;
- Held a consultation forum with agencies working with drug and alcohol related matters at Hobart City Council where informative presentations were received from Mr Mark Frohmader (Tas Health & Human Services Department), Ms Tracey Currie (ATDC (NGO AOD Peak Body) Executive Officer), Ms Penny Saile (Hobart City Council) and from Dr John Herron (ANCD Chairman);
- Conducted its regular quarterly meeting:

Joint ANCD – NIDAC AOD Consultation Forum

The joint forum with the National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) was attended by over 50 people with a number of issues being raised for discussion and debate. Specifically these issues included:

- The welcome news that a proposed new national award covering staff in many AOD services would provide for much needed salary and condition increases – although this was tempered by potential budgetary implications on services if additional funding for the increases was not provided.
- The financial struggle faced by many NGOs in meeting organisational infrastructure needs and the negative impact this was having on frontline service delivery;
- The need for more research on Tasmanian specific drug and alcohol issues;
- The ongoing development of pharmacotherapy treatment services across the State was recognised as a significant achievement; however there was considerable concern that the program was unable to meet demand. In this context, the important role of pharmacies, as well as the need to have more pharmacists involved in the opioid pharmacotherapy treatment program if it is to expand and provide the access required by people in Tasmania;
- The need for the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes in Tasmania to be signed to increase access for Indigenous people to AOD services;
- The importance of working with Local Government and Police Services in managing and monitoring high density entertainment precincts to reduce harm, particularly that caused by alcohol;
- The need for better access and input for consumers and young people into the decision making process on drug and alcohol policy issues;
- The direct Prime Ministerial appointment process of ANCD members for the next term;

ANCD Meeting

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

- To finalise its response to the Prime Minister and Minister for Health on the National Preventative Health Taskforce, National Hospitals & Health Reform Commission and Primary Health Care strategy Reports. In particular the ANCD stressed the need for health system reforms to ensure that the AOD sector and its important place in community based and supported services (residential and non-residential) are recognised as an integral part of health service delivery;
- To support the Alcohol related Harms Data Inventory Toolkit launched by ICLEI Oceania, National Local Government Drug & Alcohol Advisory Committee of the Capital City Lord Mayors;
- To reassess its current Position Paper on Naloxone in light of new information and research on the relationship of its availability to heroin related overdoses ;
- Recognised that there is evidence that increasing the legal drinking age does decrease the number of young people accessing alcohol and therefore some of the related harms but that this is a very complex area of research where any changes needed to be considered in concert with prevailing community and parental views.
- There was agreement that given the clearer evidence on brain development over time that further public information and examination on this matter was required.
- There is a need to explore the options in breaking the current nexus between legal alcohol availability, acquiring a full drivers license and leaving school all occurring around when young people are turning 18 years of age;
- There is a need for a range of alcohol related policies to be planned and implemented in an integrated way with other approaches to reducing alcohol related harm to achieve maximum benefit;
- The urgent need for the governments to clarify the recent High Court decision on liabilities and the service of alcohol, particularly in light of interpretations being drawn by some in media reports;
- Congratulated Prof Margaret Hamilton on her appointment to the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Homelessness and welcomed the significant investment in public housing and the priority for access to ensure that no one should leave care or custody [including AOD treatment] without an exit plan for somewhere to go;
- Welcomed the Draft Productivity Commission report into the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector and particularly noted the suggestions from the Commission for improved relations between government and the NGO sector;
- Agreed with the view in the consultation forum that the proposed new award that would cover many staff in NGO AOD services was welcomed but did raise cause concern on potential budgetary implications;
- Reflected upon and acknowledge the excellent work done over many years by Dr Michael Cohen (a member of the ANCD) whose sad recent passing had cut short his valuable contributions to the sector and the ANCD;

Report Launches

- The ANCD will be launching 2 major reports early in 2010 – one commissioned by its Indigenous Committee (NIDAC) on the 'Areas of Greatest Need' and one commissioned by its Asia-Pacific Committee (APDIC) on a 'Pacific Regional Assessment' - both reports will be available at www.ancd.org.au next year

Important Opportunities Open Now or Closing Soon

1. FaHCSIA – Kids in Focus Grant applications

http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/funding/Pages/kids_in_focus.aspx

2. Homeless Research Grants

http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/funding/hrp_homeless_research/Pages/default.aspx

3. National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Conference Abstracts <http://www.nidaconference.com.au/>

4. National Drug Strategy Consultation

<http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/consult>

Next Meeting

The next ANCD meeting is scheduled to be held in Canberra on the 25th & 26th of February 2010.