

Communique - October 2012

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 last year 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](#)

ANCD Consultation Forum

The ANCD met in Perth in October 2012. This meeting was preceded by a consultation forum with people who work to address drug and alcohol issues. The forum was attended by over 60 people and included presentations from Mr Neil Guard (Executive Director, WA Drug & Alcohol Office), Ms Louise Grant (Manager, WA Substance User's Association [WASUA]) and Ms Jill Rundle (Executive Officer WA Network of D&A Services [WANADA]).

Matters discussed during the forum included:

- The value of positive partnerships, based on mutual respect and co-operation, to be found in Western Australia between government services, non-government organisations and consumer groups. These partnerships have contributed greatly to the integration and delivery of services in the State.
- The importance of the inclusion of alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) education within the Australian Curriculum being developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).
- The impact of alcohol availability in schools and at school events and alcohol's appropriate role in schools.
- The importance of instituting systems to obtain alcohol sales data, noting that unlike most jurisdictions Western Australia does collect this information, making very useful local-area data available to policy and prevention planning.
- Stigma and discrimination related to alcohol or other drug use, its relation to treatment goals and employment and its severe impact on some individuals and families.
- The reports from needle and syringe programs of increases in steroid use among a population who do not see themselves as illicit drug users and are often naive to the injecting related risks they face.
- The increasing prevalence and use of synthetic cannabinoids and emerging psychostimulants.
- The high cost of opioid pharmacotherapy programs for clients. This is a national issue but these programs were seen to be particularly costly in Western Australia.
- The ageing population of drugs users, the need for recognition of this and the need for development of a national response.
- The lack of timely data available about overdoses and how this prevents the most effective policy responses being implemented.

- The relationship between ATOD treatment services and Medicare Locals and the current lack of clarity surrounding the impact of the National Health Reforms on the ATOD sector.
- The increased administrative burden on the sector associated with current reforms and the overwhelming need for Federal and State funding processes and reporting to be streamlined.
- The impact of 'fly-in-fly-out' and 'drive-in-drive-out' workers on Western Australia communities.
- The value for the sector of the work the ANCD has undertaken on recovery.
- The ANCD's position paper on Naltrexone Sustained Release Preparations (Injectable and Implants). This was criticised by one attendee for allegedly including an inaccurate statement regarding clients accessing naltrexone implants under the Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA) Special Access Scheme, which provides for access to unapproved therapeutic goods.

POSTSCRIPT: *After reviewing the paper and the evidence, the ANCD noted at its meeting that the criticism was unfounded as its paper correctly draws upon information about the Special Access Scheme provided by the TGA, which states that unapproved goods may be obtained for "persons who are seriously ill with a condition from which death is reasonably likely to occur within a matter of months, or from which premature death is reasonably likely to occur in the absence of early treatment" (Category A patients); or for "other" patients (Category B patients).*

ANCD Meeting

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

- Concern was expressed over recently reported increases in fatal opioid overdoses. The ANCD has recently raised issues of the lack of timely data available on overdoses in Australia with the Hon Mark Butler, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing. The ANCD also discussed the need for an agreed national approach to obtaining data on fatal overdoses in as timely a manner as possible, the need to improve available data on non-fatal overdoses and develop early warning systems. The potential to utilise ambulance callout records and emergency department presentations as part of developing a national approach was discussed.
- Members further discussed the issues raised at the forum in relation to ATOD education in schools and the Australian Curriculum. Current evidence on effective school drug education was discussed with reference to a recent literature review and commentary and current relevant national strategies including the National School Drug Education Strategy. Including ATOD education in the national K-12 curriculum in ways that are evidence-based, relevant and age-specific was discussed and the ANCD will directly communicate on this issue with ACARA.
- There was discussion on employment issues for people accessing ATOD treatment or who have experienced problems with alcohol or drug use. Members expressed support for the concerns expressed by many health and welfare sector representatives on the capacity of the current Job Services Australia model to assist people with complex needs.
- Members acknowledged the Inter-Governmental Committee on Drugs (IGCD) stakeholder forum report and discussed the importance of maintaining Australia's partnerships between law enforcement and health. The ANCD continues to further support law enforcement partnerships through its ongoing contact with the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) and is attending the next meeting of Police Commissioners.
- Members noted the current work of the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee, including continuing work with FAHCSIA on the Breaking the Cycle project and the forthcoming report of its Economic Modelling Project comparing prison and residential treatment.

- Members noted the current work of the Asia Pacific Drug Issues Committee, including the positive response to transitioning to voluntary based community treatment at the recent 2nd Compulsory Centres for Drug Users Roundtable. Members also welcomed the ‘*Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*’ recently released by the Federal Government and agreed that it was an excellent opportunity to promote the drug and alcohol related prevention, treatment and harm reduction obligations and opportunities that exist for Australia in the Asian Region now and in the future.
- Members noted the current work of the *Of Substance* Magazine, including the very positive independent evaluation and the plans to create an online searchable index of all articles.
- Members also received two presentations:
 - Assistant Commissioner Julian Slater on the work of the Australian Illicit Drug Data Centre. The presentation included information on the workings of the Centre, results obtained and future plans for data linkage with other collections.
 - Professor Mike Daube and Dr Julia Stafford on the work of the McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth. The presentation provided information on the priorities and activities of the Centre, including the establishment earlier this year of the Alcohol Advertising Review Board and its recent work.
- The meeting included the annual project workshop to consider research projects to be commissioned. Decisions were made to commission work in the following areas:
 - The potential use and complex issues associated with the screening of expectant mothers for AOD problems;
 - The role of information related to AOD in developing e-health record systems;
 - Consumer participation in the AOD sector;
 - Accreditation systems for AOD agencies and services;
 - An information kit on pharmacotherapies for opioid dependence;
 - Background research for a regular National Report Card on AOD in Australia.

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 early 2013.

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