

## National Council hosts drug forums in Brisbane

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has heard first hand of the range of difficulties being experienced by front-line drug and alcohol, and related workers. In conjunction with its meeting in Brisbane, the ANCD hosted a forum for drug and alcohol agencies, as well as a forum that focused on youth specific issues. Well over 150 people attended the forums with a range of issues being discussed.

Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, said "The attendance at these forums really demonstrates that workers in the drug and alcohol sector, along with their colleagues in related sectors such as education, law enforcement, housing and mental health, are desperately keen for their issues to be listened to by Governments and others who can influence decisions regarding drug policy. The enormous amount of dedication and enthusiasm amongst those working in these sectors was very encouraging, and it is vital that we ensure their efforts to help the many needy people they work with are not thwarted by a lack of support and funding for services, particularly for young people."

Major Watters added, "The members of the ANCD heard of the increasing level of problematic drug use by young people, and the disturbing range of activities some of these kids are doing to 'pay' for their drugs. The frustrations of youth workers are exacerbated by the lack of youth-specific services. As one forum participant stated, workers should not have to wait until a young, naive drug user turns into a 30 year old hard core addict before they can access reasonable levels of counselling and treatment."

Mr Vumbaca, Executive Officer of the ANCD, gave this perspective, "Positive partnerships and consultations between governments and the drug and alcohol sector, particularly the non-government sector agencies is very important. The ANCD will be writing to all State and Territory leaders, urging them to support their NGO sector. The closeness of the NGOs to the problems faced by people affected by drugs and alcohol, as well as the sector's independent and often flexible approach, make regular contact and advice from this sector crucial for effective decisions on policy and practice to be made."

Major Watters concluded "The Council also had the opportunity to raise some of these concerns directly with Minister for Health, the Hon. Wendy Edmond, and gave an undertaking to write to the Queensland Premier, the Hon. Peter Beattie and Minister for Health, detailing the specific issues from the forum".

*2 August 2001*

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*The Australian National Council on Drugs is the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy established by the Prime Minister in 1998. A copy of the forum report will be available on the ANCD web site ([www.ancd.org.au](http://www.ancd.org.au)) in August.*

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