

## National Council meets with frontline workers

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The Australian National Council on Drugs, the peak non-government advisory body to Government on drug policy established by the Prime Minister in March 1998, has recently completed its latest round of meetings in Sydney.

The Prime Minister has explicitly supported the concept of bringing the expert voice of non-government organisations and individuals working in the drug and alcohol field to the policy development table.

With this in mind, the Council has begun hosting consultation forums, where representatives from the non-government sector can come and hear about the Council, raise issues that are most concerning or relevant to them and consult with the members. This is also a key strategy used by the Council to ensure they stay in touch with the non-government sector.

Chairman of the Council, Major Brian Watters, stated "The Council's most recent forum in Sydney had over 100 attendees. It is significant that this large number of workers in the field want to contribute their expertise and experiences to help the Council ensure its advice to government is reflective of what is needed in the front-line of drug and alcohol service delivery".

Major Watters added - "There is little doubt that all workers in the drug and alcohol sector, both non-government and government, are facing a multitude of complex problems at this point of time. Dealing with issues such as dual diagnosis, that is, people with mental health and drug and alcohol problems, the need for more culturally appropriate services, particularly for indigenous people was also a major issue, as was the lack of services in rural and regional areas"

Mr Gino Vumbaca, Executive Officer for the Council added that - "Many of the debates in the general community are also occurring amongst drug and alcohol workers. For instance the impact of the GST on small non-government agencies, the trial of a supervised injecting facility, high rates of hepatitis C within the prison system and the increasing number of heroin related overdoses"

Mr Vumbaca added "Whilst the Council is unable to deal with all the issues raised in the agency forums it certainly provides us with an opportunity to put many of these issues on the National agenda".

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