

National Council praise for NSW drug summit response

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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 given its support to the comprehensive approach taken by the NSW Government.

The Council considered the response of the NSW Government to the July 1999 Drug Summit at its meeting in Perth last week.

Major Brian Watters, Chairman of the Council said "There is little doubt in the mind of the Council that the approach taken by the NSW is comprehensive and deserving of community support. The targeting of services to families, youth, regional areas, prevention and education is something that the Council has been advising all Governments to focus on for some time now. The Council is particularly pleased to see initiatives directed at breaking the cycle of drug use and crime. The diversion of drug users from the criminal justice system is an area that the Federal Government is already committed to providing substantial resources, and this has been duly embraced by the NSW Government as well."

The National Council's NSW based representatives also made strong statements of support, in relation to their area of expertise, on the Government response.

Mr Wesley Noffs (Ted Noffs Foundation) congratulated the NSW Government stating that "The initiatives for youth in this response are to be applauded, in particular the commitment to involve young people in the decision making process on service delivery and the goal to make all services youth friendly. Young people represent the future of this country and deserve the support and assistance of all government and community services to achieve their full potential"

Mr Tony Trimmingham (Family Drug Support) added that "The important role of families in dealing with drug use issues should never be underestimated and I fully support the inclusion of family focussed initiatives across all this package. There are many families I deal with on a daily basis that are desperate for assistance and support in understanding drug use and these needs have been too often neglected in the past"

Another member of the Council, NSW Magistrate Craig Thompson of Bankstown Local Court, stated "Obviously in my role as a magistrate I encounter far too many people engaging in drug related crime. Treatment options and education initiatives which break the cycle of drug dependency and crime should be welcomed by those working in the justice and law enforcement system and the community generally"

Professor Ian Webster, an Executive member of the Council based at Liverpool Hospital added "The Council is very pleased to see a focus on improving drug services for those people already engaging in harmful drug use by committing additional resources to the juvenile and adult correctional systems. The benefits to the

wider community, if we can address the problems affecting those engaging in drug related crime, can be significant"

Major Watters also confirmed that the Council advice offered to the NSW Government about its response included strengthening the involvement of the non-government sector and drug user representative groups in decisions and service delivery and the need to focus more on drug issues affecting the indigenous community. He stated that "Whilst the NSW Government response includes a sprinkling of initiatives aimed at addressing indigenous issues across the whole package, the Council does believe that a more co-ordinated and deliberate approach that involves the local communities is needed. The involvement and input of those who work with people affected by drugs in the decision making process, as has occurred at the Federal level with the ANCD should also be a goal of all States and Territories"

In response to the trial supervised injecting room to be established in the Kings Cross area Major Watters advised that "There are a range of views on this matter within the Council, as is the case in the community. We have written to the Premier to provide our advice. In particular, on the need for this initiative to be managed carefully and thoroughly evaluated. The Australian community is becoming increasingly concerned and educated in matters dealing with drug use and will expect rigorous qualitative and quantitative information before a judgement about this program can be made. The Council has also requested that it be kept informed on the evaluation and general progress of this initiative"

In other discussions held by the Council in Perth, Major Watters has advised that the Council finalised its submission to the Australian National Council on AIDS and Related Diseases on the Draft National Hepatitis C Strategy - an initiative that was unanimously supported by the Council.

"The Council considered a range of Commonwealth initiatives presented at the meeting and we are very pleased at the high level of financial commitment and the whole of government advances being made by the Federal Government and its agencies on this important matter. This is something the Prime Minister can take a lot of credit for" Major Watters also stated.

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