

New look Council meets in Canberra

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD), including the newly appointed members, recently met in Parliament House in Canberra.

All Council members expressed their disappointment and concern at the initial media headlines labelling the ANCD as a 'zero tolerance Council'. As Major Watters stated "Any reasonable analysis of the individuals appointed to the ANCD by the Prime Minister, and their long histories in working within the drug and alcohol area, will clearly show that the new membership again represents a diverse range of views. The continual use of combative rhetoric, such as 'a war on drugs' and 'zero tolerance' by the media is not only offensive, particularly for families dealing with drug use, but also untrue. This Council has been and will remain committed to reducing the harm created by alcohol and drugs to individuals and communities ."

During the meeting, ANCD members took the opportunity to meet with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Kim Beazley, the Shadow Minister for Health, Ms Jenny Macklin and the Shadow Minister for Justice, Mr Duncan Kerr. Members also met with a number of Federal MP's, including Mr Barry Wakelin, who is chairing the Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Use.

Major Brian Watters, Chair of the ANCD stated - "The ANCD has long been calling for the de-politicisation of drug issues. Members of the Council are keen to pursue this by speaking with all political parties, and ensuring that those in powerful positions clearly understand the issues affecting our communities."

"In the Prime Minister's statement announcing the ANCD, he reinforced the Council as a key body on drug policy and playing a critical role in ensuring the voice of the community is heard in relation to drug related policies and strategies, by providing independent, expert advice. These discussions with all political leaders, in fact, go to the heart of the role of the ANCD."

Major Watters said that "Whilst the Council discussed a number of issues at this meeting, the presentation by Mr Ted Wilkes, Chair of the National Reference Group for ATSI People, strengthened the commitment of the Council to prioritise drug and alcohol issues affecting indigenous communities. Mr Wilkes's presentation highlighted the complexity of indigenous issues – including the need for more positive interactions between ATSI groups and government, structural determinants of substance misuse including housing and employment, and the need to promote further development of ATSI leadership. The impact of Mr Wilkes presentation was profound and the Council will be ensuring that the current ATSI projects being conducted for the ANCD are used to further the aims of Mr Wilkes reference group".

The ANCD also announced that it will be releasing a number of research papers over the next few months. These papers include:

- Heroin Overdoses: Prevalence, Correlates, Consequences and Interventions
- Structural Determinants for Youth Drug Use

- The Australian Approach: Drug Practice, Policy and Achievements
- Evidence Supporting Treatment

Major Watters concluded, "The Council has also resolved to commission work that will map all available drug and alcohol treatment services across Australia. Although we are aware of the difficulties that some jurisdictions may have in relation to this project, the ANCD is determined to inform itself of the actual number, location and nature of all treatment services available. This project is a necessary and valuable tool which will allow the Council, and governments, to make better decisions about future location, expansion and funding of AOD services".

26 April 2001

The Australian National Council on Drugs is the peak advisory body to Government on drug policy established by the Prime Minister in 1998. (www.ancd.org.au)

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