

Rural and regional drug issues deserve focused strategy: ANCD

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has today launched its national report arising from its consultations with the rural and regional alcohol and other drugs sector.

The Council undertook a series of consultation forums to give a national voice to the concerns and ideas of rural and regional drug workers.

Chairman of the ANCD, Major Brian Watters, said “In undertaking these consultations, the ANCD was very aware that often the drug debate focuses on the situation in our cities. The Council saw this as a potential weakness in the development, and ultimately the applicability, of national drug policies and practices.”

Continuing, Major Watters remarked, “The ANCD is hopeful that the release of this report will lead to a greater recognition of the need for extra support to drug and alcohol agencies and their staff who are working in rural and regional areas. The significant demands on staff – some of whom are traveling 5 and 6 hours to see clients – and the higher level of expenses in providing services to these communities, needs to be reflected in funding allocations. Many of these communities are doing it tough and are facing great disadvantage, however despite these very difficult circumstances, I was heartened by the innovation, commitment and versatility of many of the people I met in these agencies”.

Major Watters also added, “We also heard of the concern in some communities that whilst young people appear to be pretty well informed on the damaging health effects of alcohol, tobacco and most other drugs, they do not it seems, have a similar appreciation of cannabis and its negative health effects, particularly from prolonged use – as has been highlighted in recent research.

Forums were held in locations as diverse as Launceston, Broome and Mount Isa as well as many **other centres (*)**, though the ANCD has cautioned that the Report is not intended to be interpreted as representing all rural and regional areas or agencies. Nonetheless the Council was able to draw conclusions from the consultations and make a number of specific and broad recommendations to government. In summary, the Council’s recommendations include:

- Development of a rural and regional drug and alcohol strategy, focussing on the importance of community participation.
- A review of funding allocations to rural and regionally based drug and alcohol services.
- Support for more innovative approaches to drug and alcohol service delivery.
- Greater encouragement for business and local government to become involved in drug and alcohol issues.
- Better training and involvement of rural and regionally based GPs and other generalist health providers to improve alcohol and drug services.

- Greater sensitivity and awareness of the impact of media reporting of drug issues, particularly adult perceptions of young people.
- Clarifying community confusion on cannabis use and its health effects, particularly for young people.
- The need for incentives for capital investment in rural and regional areas.

In conclusion, the ANCD Executive Officer, Mr Vumbaca stated, "The ANCD Report confirms that alcohol remains the substance causing the most damage in our community. The people attending these forums spoke of the high degree of acceptance of alcohol use and the need to change these attitudes. Everyone also recognises that the decision to seek assistance for drug and alcohol problems is far more difficult in small communities. It requires a greater level of public understanding, assisted by responsible media reporting for drug issues, if people are to feel comfortable about coming forward for assistance. The Council is also backing up its commitment to the rural and regional drug and alcohol sector by agreeing to host a number of rural and regional co-morbidity workshops this year, as well as repeating its study grants program for rural and regionally based drug and alcohol workers."

Major Watters also took the opportunity to congratulate We Help Ourselves on the celebration of 30 years of outstanding treatment and services for drug users and their families at the opening of their new rehabilitation centre in Cessnock.

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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.

For further information, please contact:

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*ANCD Rural and Regional Alcohol and Other Drug Consultation Forum Locations:

[Port Augusta](#) — South Australia

[Kalgoorlie](#) — Western Australia

[Broome](#) — Western Australia

[Traralgon](#) — Victoria Bendigo — Victoria

[Mt Isa](#) — Queensland

[Rockhampton](#) — Queensland

[Launceston](#) — Tasmania

[Dubbo](#) — New South Wales

[Coffs Harbour](#) — New South Wales

[Alice Springs](#) — Northern Territory

