

## Statement by the Australian National Council on Drugs

# Statement by the Australian National Council on Drugs



The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) has expressed both concern and disappointment at the recent comments made by the Hon Bronwyn Bishop whilst chairing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family & Human Services Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families.

Firstly, the ANCD is concerned because the statements made by the Chairman unfortunately reflect a lack of knowledge and understanding on the National Drug Strategy and its achievements to date.

The National Drug Strategy is supported by the Federal, State & Territory Governments, as well as the ANCD and the many sectors involved in addressing drug and alcohol problems in Australia. This support has been met with an unprecedented level of funding from the current Australian Government. As a result, Australia now invests heavily in reducing the supply of illicit drugs and successfully targets those that seek to profit from the manufacture and trafficking of illicit drugs. We also see a much greater level of investment in providing treatment and support for those affected with drug and alcohol problems, as well as making significant investments to inform and educate the general public, and particularly young people, to prevent drug and alcohol problems. Finally for those unable or unwilling to cease their drug use or seek treatment and support there is investment in harm reduction programs to minimise the risk of HIV, hepatitis C and other harms associated with problematic drug use.

This balanced approach taken by Australia has been very effective. There have been dramatic declines in illicit drug use in Australia, dramatic declines in drug related deaths and we still have one of the lowest rates of HIV amongst drug users in the Western world. Importantly, we also have the infrastructure and partnerships in place to deal with new drug problems when they appear.

The increasing focus of the Region on Australia and its drug and alcohol strategy is a further sign of the achievements Australia has made.

Secondly, the ANCD is disappointed because it is an organisation that prides itself on being available and accessible to explain the evidence underpinning its drug and alcohol advice. It is unfortunate that the Standing Committee never sought the views of the ANCD or its Co-Deputy Chair, Professor Margaret Hamilton, either in private or at a public hearing prior to making these public comments.

On hearing the comments from the Inquiry, the ANCD membership has expressed their resolute support for Professor Hamilton and her work with the ANCD. They are upset at the use of partial quotes to impugn the reputation of Professor Hamilton. This is neither warranted nor helpful.

The ANCD calls upon the Standing Committee to focus on hearing the full range of available evidence and then advising on how best the government can assist families facing drug problems.

These families need real and properly considered advice. The ANCD asks all members of the Standing

Committee to keep an open mind on the evidence and not use the process for political or grandstanding purposes. This is the least that families in crisis with drugs deserve from their elected representatives.

Earlier this year the ANCD advised the Standing Committee that it has commissioned 2 major reports on the impact of drug and alcohol use on families.

The first of these reports focuses on families where the parents or guardians of children are involved in problematic drug and alcohol use. This report has been completed and will be released publicly in the next 6–8 weeks. The Standing Committee has already been offered an advance copy for its deliberations.

The second of these reports focuses on the families where children are involved in problematic drug and alcohol use. This report is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

ANCD members are appointed by the Prime Minister. Its Chairman is Dr John Herron and its members include some of the most prominent experts in Australian in the drug and alcohol fields of research, treatment, law enforcement and policy. There are hundreds of years of collective experience and expertise on drug and alcohol issues gathered together on this one council.

For further information on the membership and role of the ANCD please visit [www.ancd.org.au](http://www.ancd.org.au)

*7 March 2007*

---

*The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.*

For further information, please contact:

Mr Gino Vumbaca (ANCD Executive Officer)  
0408 244 552