

Presentation by Dr Dennis Young to the 22nd IFNGO Biannual World Conference Macau, 14-18 May 2007.

My presentation today will focus on Overview of current Australian National Council on Drugs projects in support of families experiencing problems through alcohol & other drug use.

The National response to alcohol and drugs in Australia is founded upon the National Drug Strategy with its Mission to improve health, social and economic outcomes by preventing the uptake of harmful drug use and reducing the harmful effects of licit and illicit drugs in Australian society.

This National Drug Strategy is founded upon a balanced policy incorporating the three core elements of Supply reduction, Demand reduction and Harm reduction. The government referred to its response to illicit drugs use in Australia by the name of 'Tough on Drugs'. Through this program the Australian Government has injecting over \$1.5b since 1998 into the alcohol and drug field.

One of the major new policy directions was the establishment of the National Council on Drugs. The ANCD reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and is:

- Principal advisory body to Government on drug policy
- Plays critical role in ensuring the voice of the community is heard in relation to drug related policies and strategies
- Membership appointed by the Prime Minister of Australia; 3yr term
- Membership includes people with a wide range of experience and expertise on various aspects of drug policy, such as treatment, rehabilitation, education, family counselling, law enforcement, research and work at the coalface in community organizations.

The ANCD has produced a number of research reports that are available from the ANCD through their web site www.ancd.org.au. One of the reports the ANCD produced was the *Asian - Pacific Report*. This report reported on:

- A situational analysis of illicit drug issues and responses in the Asia-Pacific region
- Released in 2006 –
- Provides a snapshot of what's happening with drugs across the Asia-Pacific region

In particular it reveals:

- Significant rise in the use, production and trafficking of illicit drugs across the Asian region
- Amphetamines are making substantial inroads in to youth cultures in many countries
- China has now set up a massive network of methadone treatment centres across the country
- Cambodia is now the world's largest source of cannabis for the global market
- 74.5% of Hong Kong drug users nominate heroin as their drug of choice
- 80% of HIV infections in Indonesia are linked directly to injecting drug use
- 60% of Malaysian injecting drug users share needles and syringes
- Ice is now the main drug in the Philippines
- 25,000 new drug users are appearing in Thailand every year
- Up to 120 people in Vietnam a day are being infected with HIV of which 60% of them are because of injecting drugs

The ANCD has three major ongoing functions and these are:

- The Asia Pacific Drug Issues Committee,
- Of Substance – National alcohol and drug magazine,
- The National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee.

The 'Of Substance' Magazine is an Australian national magazine on alcohol tobacco and other drugs and is:

- An ANCD initiative - receives funding from the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing
- First issue launched in October 2003 and now publishes four issues per year – in January, April, July and October
- Topics covered to date include; articles on treatment, early intervention and prevention
- Current subscription over 12,000 with an estimated readership above 30,000
- Subscription is free and can be accessed by going to the website www.ofsubstance.org.au

The third major ongoing committee is the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee. Apart of these standing committees the ANCD has undertaken a number of projects over the years and the current projects include:

- Families (2 projects)
- Rural & Regional Workforce Development Grants (Annual)
- Annual National Drug & Alcohol Awards (Annual)
- Compulsory Treatment
- Working With Homeless People Who Use Drugs
- Sustainability of Non-Government Organisations in the Alcohol and Other Drugs Sector
- Drug Detection & Testing in Schools
- Opioid Pharmacotherapy Review

The projects I wish to focus on is the two family projects which will provide an improved understanding of the issues facing families who are experiencing harms associated with alcohol and drug use.

Project 1: Drug Use in the Family. - Impacts & Implications for Children – due for release 21/05/07. (**Article on this project in next issue of “Of Substance”**)

Project 2: Supporting Families - Investigating support options for family members of young people with problematic drug use – due for release later 2007. Copies of both reports can be obtained free of cost: e-mail ancd@ancd.org.au

The first family project aims to:

- Provide literature review on the nature, scale and characteristics of problematic, parental drug use in Australia
- Review of the short and longer term impacts of problematic, parental drug use on children’s growth and development
- Identify structural and social factors relevant to the aetiology of drug and alcohol use, for parents and for children
- Analysis and commentary on the current legislative, regulatory and other arrangements that affect the health and well-being of children of problematic drug using parents
- Describe the key policy directions required, in relation to family and parental drug use, to support (as well as those likely to hinder) the health and related interests of children
- Make recommendations to the ANCD in relation to structural, policy, program or other changes which are necessary in order to realise the opportunities to reduce risks for children of parents who problematically use drugs (including the early recognition of such families)

The findings from this project included:

- Use of alcohol and other drugs in households with dependent children is high; in particular high rates of binge drinking
- Estimations of numbers of children at risk are provided in the report but are not available until its release

- Difficult to disentangle the effects of parental substance use from broader social and economic factors that contribute to and maintain the misuse of drugs and alcohol
- No specific comparison between substance classes regarding risk to adverse child outcome
- Treatment services need to help families with parental substance abuse better manage the daily stressors associated with socio economic disadvantage to reduce the impact of this risk factor on children. Tackling drug use in isolation is unlikely to be effective without addressing the key context issues of unemployment and poor housing
- Effective interventions need to target the parent's capacity to seek and sustain support systems in their family and social networks
- Significant protective factor for children is the experience of a secure relationship with his/her parents. All attempts should be made to enhance this relationship through support of the parent(s) while engaged in treatment

The second family ANCD project aims:

- To outline the ways that a young person's problematic drug use impacts on family members and to establish the range of needs of family members
- To identify the key elements of programs or services in Australia and overseas that involve family members seeking assistance for themselves
- To provide an overview of the research evidence about the effectiveness of programs or services that target family members
- To make recommendations about the effectiveness of the elements of programs or services that target family members of young people who are problematic drug users.

The ANCD provides these research reports free:

- Assist development of improved practice and policy outcomes both nationally and internationally

- Form the bases upon which ANCD provides advice and recommendations to Governments
- Assist Government and non-government agencies increase knowledge and understanding of alcohol & drug use and how it impacts upon families in Australia

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