

National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee
Australian National Council on Drugs

COMMUNIQUÉ

1st March 2007

As part of its commitment to provide high level advice to government, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) - which is the principal advisory body to government on drug and alcohol issues - established the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) in 2004 to specifically identify the most appropriate and effective approach for the ANCD to contribute to addressing Indigenous drug and alcohol issues within Australia.

NIDAC comprises a range of members from non-government and government organisations with specialist expertise and broad experience in dealing with Indigenous drug and alcohol issues.

At its March 2007 meeting in Melbourne, NIDAC discussed the following issues:

Liquor Licensing Issues

In a follow-up discussion on a previous meeting with Liquor Licensing authorities, the need for the collection of appropriate data such as alcohol sales, hospitalisations related to alcohol and police incidents related to alcohol to inform policy and decision making bodies, was raised. Data collection systems in the jurisdictions and the availability of such important information to guide policy and treatment appeared to be varied and limited.

Without accurate and consistent data on alcohol sales and consumption made available from all jurisdictions, policy makers, practitioners and treatment services are limited in their capacity to advise on alcohol licensing problems across Australia. More importantly NIDAC expressed concern on the limitations placed upon the decision making ability of licensing authorities without an extensive range of data being available.

NIDAC resolved to write to each jurisdiction outlining their concerns regarding the availability of alcohol sales data and other relevant information.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey for 2008

The measures for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey for 2008 are currently being reviewed. NIDAC has advised the Australian Bureau of Statistics that this is an excellent opportunity for the survey to be expanded and include measures on consumption levels, usage, poly drug use, and expenditure. Given the lack of current and robust data an expansion on existing measures would provide a valuable insight into the patterns and culture of drug and alcohol use by Indigenous people in Australia.

Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Workers Salaries and Conditions

NIDAC is concerned that many Indigenous drug and alcohol workers are not appropriately paid for the work they undertake, particularly given the high expectations placed upon them. The need to provide increased remuneration for workers acquiring additional skills was also highlighted.

Accordingly NIDAC will be corresponding with a range of relevant Federal, State and Territory departments on this matter.

Inclusion of East Kimberly region (WA) in the Australian Government's 8 point plan to address petrol sniffing

Addressing petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities is a priority for NIDAC and it supports a range of measures designed to eliminate its existence, including the roll out of "unsniffable" OPAL fuel to Central Australian communities as part of the Australian Government's "whole of government" "eight point plan in the Central Australian region. NIDAC recognises that petrol sniffing also needs to be addressed in other areas and supports the Australian Government's decision to extend the roll out of OPAL fuel to the East Kimberly region where there is a significant prevalence of petrol sniffing.

Development of an ANCD, NIDAC proposal to address petrol sniffing in Central Australia

Dialogue between the ANCD, NIDAC and the petroleum industry to develop and consider proposals to address petrol sniffing is continuing. NIDAC will be developing a proposal for an initiative which will be aimed at supporting youth at risk and reducing the high prevalence of petrol sniffing amongst youth in Central Australia. The proposal is expected to complement existing youth initiatives and target those youth who are disengaged and at high risk.

Focus on Indigenous alcohol and drug use in urban areas

Reports of increases in the uptake of illicit drugs amongst Indigenous people in urban areas and the need for appropriate treatment services has prompted NIDAC to promote a greater focus on illicit drug use in urban areas.

Alcohol and Substance Misuse Management Plans

NIDAC emphasises the importance and expressed its strong support of Indigenous community consultation in the initial and ongoing development of community alcohol and substance misuse management plans.

"Identifying Areas of Greatest Need Project"

NIDAC is committed to providing advice on ways of addressing the serious issues that exist for Indigenous Australians. In order to provide a foundation for this work, NIDAC is commissioning a project to determine the current level and location of Indigenous specific drug and alcohol services available across Australia. The final report is expected to be available in 12 months.

Next Meeting

Members were informed that the next meeting will be held in Darwin on the 1st of May 2007 and Alice Springs on the 2nd of May 2007. Consultation forums will be held in the morning in Darwin and in the afternoon in Alice Springs.

Conclusion

More information on the NIDAC and the ANCD is available by accessing the ANCD website: www.ancd.org.au or by contacting the NIDAC Secretariat: PO Box 1552 Canberra ACT 2601 P 02 62791650 or F 02 62791610.

Post Script – NIDAC Executive Statement

Central Australia initiatives

NIDAC endorses the concerns expressed by William Tilmouth, CEO Tangentyere Council that the “dry town” proposal for Alice Springs may have the effect of driving drinkers back to camps, further endangering the safety of the women and children that live there. The Alice Springs Town Council’s current proposal to prohibit the consumption of alcohol in Alice Springs needs to be treated with caution as the consequences may simply move those who need intervention to other areas, placing even greater pressure on services. Greater support is needed to strengthen AOD services, policing and interventions that target behaviour change in the consumption of alcohol rather than initiatives that would continue to place families and children at risk.

NIDAC warmly welcomes the significant reductions reported in petrol sniffing amongst youth in Central Australia and supports the continuation of existing initiatives that contributed to this reduction. With the continued assistance of the Australian Government, the petroleum industry and local services there is a real opportunity to consolidate these gains and ensure a positive long term outlook for Indigenous youth in this region.

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