



Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

PO Box 4736, HIGGINS ACT 2615, Telephone (02) 6254 2961

Email mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au Web <http://ffdlr.org.au>

NEWSLETTER

November 08

ISSN 1444-200

NEXT Meeting – BBQ followed by Annual General Meeting

Thursday 27 November 2007

See details below

Annual General Meeting

Our last meeting for 2008 will be an **end of year BBQ followed by our Annual General Meeting** including election of office bearers and presentation of the President's and Treasurer's annual report.

This will take place on Thursday 27th November at 6:30pm for the BBQ and 8:00pm for the AGM at Marion and Brian's home.

Marion and Brian will supply meat etc but **could members please bring either a salad or sweet.**

Members and their family are most welcome.

For catering purposes please let Marion know if you are coming and what you can contribute in the way of a salad or sweet.

RSVP

If you don't know our address we will give it to you when you contact us.

Looking forward to a pleasant evening together.

Focus on helping people experiencing homelessness with alcohol and drug problems

ANCD – OCTOBER 31ST 2008

Australian National Council on Drugs says it's time for a much bigger focus on helping people experiencing homelessness with alcohol and drug problems – some reports are highlighting that a person experiencing homelessness is 33 times more likely to have an opiate problem, 6 times more likely to have a drug use disorder

and for those 'sleeping rough' over half are dependent on alcohol.

A major new website has been designed to support homelessness services helping their clients with drug and alcohol problems. The new website at www.hip.org.au offers a range of fact sheets for homeless service providers on addressing drug and alcohol problems with people experiencing homelessness. It also offers an extensive database of services that could work with the homeless services/sector to help people with drug and alcohol misuse problems.

ANCD Chairman Dr John Herron says there needs to be a much greater investment in and focus on helping people, who are experiencing homelessness, deal with alcohol and drug issues – with some studies showing:

- a person experiencing homelessness is 33 times more likely to have an opiate problem;
- a person experiencing homelessness is 6 times more likely to have a drug use disorder;
- in NSW 14.6% of people requiring support accommodation had problematic drug and alcohol use;
- in Sydney a service providing assistance to people who sleep rough, reported that up to 55% of its clients have a dependence on alcohol;
- in a national survey of injecting drug users, over 10% reported that they had no fixed address;
- in a survey of emergency accommodation services in Australia it was reported that nearly all services dealt with young people that were both experiencing homelessness and substance use dependence.

Recent figures have shown that over 100,000 people are homeless every night – a third of them are under the age of 25 and 22,000 of them are teenagers. This problem has been estimated to have doubled in the past 20 years.

The most recent statistics are a real cause for concern:

- 12,133 of Australia's homeless are children under the age of 12
- Over 100,000 people are homeless with more than 16,000 'sleeping rough' – 7,500 are families with children
- Over 46,000 people experiencing homelessness are staying with friends and relatives and over 21,000 are staying in boarding houses
- 56% of those experiencing homelessness are male, 10% are indigenous and 7% are over 65.

Dr Herron is deeply concerned about the high rates of alcohol and drug misuse amongst people experiencing

homelessness. He is also deeply concerned at the exposure of children affected by homelessness to other people's substance use or even more concerning, using any substances themselves to cope with the distress and trauma from homelessness. "If we don't protect young people from this we know the severe consequences this may cause them and their families."

ANCD Executive member, Professor Margaret Hamilton said "Care, support, professional responses and treatment should be the right of any person in the community suffering with drug and alcohol trouble and dependence. Those who are experiencing homelessness are citizens who are no different. The likelihood of them needing this type of response is even greater than the general community".

Trends in property and illicit drug-related crime in Kings Cross: An update

*Crime and Justice Bulletin Number 120 September 2008
Lucy Snowball, Melissa Burgess and Bryan Price*

Previous studies examining the impact of Sydney's Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) on drug-related crime in Kings Cross have found that the Centre had no adverse effects.

This study examined trends in robbery, theft and drug offences in Kings Cross over a six-year period (from the commencement of MSIC in May 2001 until December 2007) and compared these to trends in the rest of Sydney. Spatial analysis of the distribution of selected drug offences and 'move-on' incidents was also conducted.

The present study finds a continuation of the decline in the incidence of robbery and property crime in Kings Cross. The results for drug offences were mixed. There were increases in arrests for possession/use of cocaine and possession/use of amphetamine but decreases in arrests for dealing/trafficking in narcotics and use/possession of narcotics. Spatial analysis revealed an increase in the proportion of 'move-ons' and persons arrested for drug/use possession within 50 metres of the MSIC.

It is unclear whether these trends are attributable to the MSIC itself or other factors in the Kings Cross area.

Full document can be found here:

[http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/CJB120.pdf/\\$file/CJB120.pdf](http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/CJB120.pdf/$file/CJB120.pdf)

Better to seek help than end up dead

5th November 2008, 6:00 West Australian

Down south, celebrating [school] leavers [events] have the word of Sgt Ian Clarke, of Dunsborough Police, that if they are under the weather from overindulging in alcohol or drugs and ask his officers for help, they will not get into trouble.

While a big crackdown had been planned for under-age binge drinking in caravan parks and motels, leavers suffering from the side effects of excess should not be afraid to seek assistance, he said.

"They should not be frightened to come to us," he said. "They are not going to get in trouble if they turn up under

the influence of something. We would rather have them with us, where we can look after them.

"If leavers have gone too far and their health is at risk, we will get them to a hospital and ensure that they are OK. A little blip on the radar can be smoothed over and dealt with fairly quickly."

"Better this than destroy their lives and that of their families", he said.

"Down the track they might get in trouble from their parents but that is the worst that is going to happen. That would be much better than ending up in a coffin, which is a constant risk and one that is very high in our minds. Especially, if they are drinking to excess and left to their own devices.

"That is why we really encourage that you look after your mates and get them to us if need be — there are people here who will look after them, will not be judgmental and will make sure they are OK."

Sgt Clarke has the responsibility of safeguarding the 4000 leavers, on average, who flock to the out-of-town, bus-linked Dunsborough entertainment zone each night. The zone, Sgt Clarke said, was a cordoned-off area with a carnival-like atmosphere, keeping the leavers safe from the criminal element that regarded them as soft targets and was attracted to them. Already, the zone and its back-up transport service had won a 93 per cent approval rating in independent surveys of past leavers.

"Over the five-day period last year, we had just one fight (in the zone) — a push and shove — which was resolved in less than 30 seconds," Sgt Clarke said.

Organised celebrations at Dunsborough this year would have a particular focus on sobriety, with those maintaining this frame of mind rewarded with prizes. It was part of a strategy, he said, to encourage teenagers to get the benefits of being sober and still enjoy the leavers experience.

"Past leavers themselves have said they got a lot more out of leavers [events] from remaining relatively sober and having a handle on what was going on rather than being blind drunk and unwell," Sgt Clarke said.

Last year, 76 leavers were treated at Busselton Hospital and 23 at Margaret River Hospital, with the most common reasons for attending the Emergency Department being excessive alcohol consumption, car accidents, falls, assaults and sunburn.

Leading Swiss newspaper calls for decriminalizing cannabis and for legislation formalizing approval of heroin-assisted treatment

The Neue Zuercher Zeitung (NZZ), 25 Oct 08, strongly endorsed favorable action on 2 national referenda on the ballot for 30 Nov. One would decriminalize cannabis and calls upon the Federal Government to regulate its production and trade. The other would provide on-going legislative authority for the clinical provision of heroin in the treatment of opioid dependence; currently the regulatory ok for heroin treatment is set to expire at the end of 2009.

The paper rejects the opposition's claim that the current drug problems are the result of weak enforcement of

prohibitionist laws, noting that "the fact is the side effects of prohibition are known to manifoldly exceed the negative effects of drug use itself." The NZZ goes on to acknowledge "the understandable concerns of parents and educators" with respect to legalization of cannabis, but concludes that "drug policies must be grounded on evidence, rather than reflect unsubstantiated fears."

International review and UK guidance weigh merits of buprenorphine versus methadone maintenance

From FINDINGS, EFFECTIVENESS BANK BULLETIN 7 November 2008

An analysis of the most clinically relevant studies of buprenorphine versus methadone maintenance treatment of opiate dependence has confirmed that buprenorphine has slightly less 'holding power', but that among patients who are retained, there are equivalent reductions in the illegal use of opiate-type drugs. The findings informed new UK guidelines on the treatments.

FINDINGS The comparison between flexible-dose sublingual (absorbed under the tongue) buprenorphine and oral methadone was one of several made in the [updated review](#)¹ for the Cochrane Collaboration, one of the world's most trusted sources. Where possible, results of relevant studies were statistically pooled. The analysis is important because studies which allow clinicians to adjust the dose depending on how the patient reacts more closely reflect actual and [recommended clinical practice](#)² than fixed-dose studies.

Across the eight studies 18% more methadone than buprenorphine patients remained in treatment for the time periods. The periods assessed by the studies and included in the Cochrane analysis were varied from six weeks to a year. This means, for example, that if 60 out of 100 patients were retained on buprenorphine, had they instead been prescribed methadone, typically another 11 would have stayed in treatment. Retention over at

least these periods is key because when patients leave, relapse to dependent illicit opiate use is the norm.

Among the studies which provided this data, numbers of positive urine tests (indicative of continuing illegal opiate use) only slightly and non-significantly favoured buprenorphine. The same was true for the patients' own accounts of their heroin use. There were also no significant differences in use of cocaine or benzodiazepines or in crime.

Seizures of ice on the rise

Paul Maley, The Australian, November 04, 2008

AUTHORITIES recorded a 16-fold increase in the amount of ice seized at the border in one year, fuelling concerns that Australia is in the grip of an epidemic of the party drug.

In its annual report tabled in parliament last week, Customs said 224.83kg of ice, or crystal methamphetamine, was seized in 2007-08, compared with 14.45kg in 2006-07. In 2005-06, a quarter of last year's amount, 55kg, was seized.

Customs national manager for investigations Richard Janeczko told The Australian that the rise was due to a range of factors, including better detection, an expanding market and a displacement effect, as criminals sought to import the drug whole, rather than the precursor chemicals.

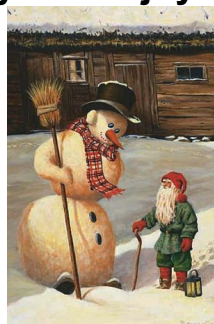
The Customs report also records a marked increase in the amount of steroids intercepted by authorities. In 2007-08, there were 1457 interceptions of steroids, compared with 1100 the year before and 709 in 2005-06.

And cocaine seizures have been tracking upwards, with 649.29kg detected last year, compared with 609.95kg of cocaine in 2006-07.

Increasingly, crime syndicates are turning to illegal tobacco. Last year, 287,455kg of illegal tobacco and about 106.8 million cigarettes were seized, compared with 67,422kg of tobacco and 39.8 million cigarettes held in 2006-07.

To all our members and your families we wish you a joyful Christmas

Remember this will be the last newsletter for the year. We will have a break until we have our first meeting on 26 February 2009.



President's Annual Report 2008

(Presented at the November AGM)

Introduction

This thirteenth President's report covers the 12 month period from November 2007 to November 2008.

I would like to thank all those who contributed during the year to the group's activities by writing letters, writing submissions, visiting MPs and others, participating in media events, addressing groups and meetings, assisting with various organised activities, participating and providing support and attending meetings. I would like especially to thank my office bearers John Ley, vice president; Bob McFadden, treasurer; and Cynthia Groundwater, secretary and Joan Westaway who has ably filled in for Cynthia when Cynthia was away. I also thank Marion McConnell for her organising work and support, and St Ninian's Church for the use of its hall.

Bill Bush adds a very important dimension to our work through his professionally and compassionately written submissions. We, as members of FFDLR, have every reason to be proud of the high quality of our submissions that are submitted to Parliamentary and other inquiries. Most of this is due to the valuable work that Bill puts into that task and I thank him very much. However it is more than just submissions – the new FFDLR brochures are also Bill's and his son's work.

Events of significance

Internationally there are signs of a change in thinking on the issue of illicit drugs. The United Nations, once a strong defender of the law enforcement/zero tolerance solution has shown that it is prepared to change. It has moved from the futile statement of its undersecretary, Pino Arlacchi, who claimed the world could be drug free by 2008 to a position of recognition of the reality. In a joint statement between UNODC, WHO and UNAIDS it has thrown its full weight behind needle and syringe programs and opioid substitution therapy.

However objectivity and reality is not universal and UK Prime Minister Brown, against advice, rescheduled cannabis on the same par as heroin. Such populist actions mean we will remain in the dark ages of drug policy for some time yet.

In Australia the welcome attention to alcohol has unfortunately deprived illicit drug policy of the attention that it deserves. Even so, the change of government signalled the end of the Howard zero tolerance rhetoric and the ALP has indicated its full support for harm minimisation and relevant ministers since the election have reiterated that commitment. To date, though, there has been little to indicate an official willingness to address the contradictions between the three arms of the national harm minimisation policy of supply reduction, harm reduction and demand reduction. Measures in pursuit of any one of these arms needs to be co-ordinated to ensure, on the basis of the best available evidence, that such measures do not undermine the other arms, something that law enforcement so often does.

At a state level, facilities like the supervised injecting room in Sydney could be under threat of closing – not so much from the current government but from the possibility of a change of government with a different philosophy toward that facility. Maintenance treatments for addiction and needle and syringe programs are always in constant threat of funding or resource cutbacks, notwithstanding that these services already continue to be under funded and under resourced.

The media generally continues dramatically to report seizures as the “biggest” drug bust ever. However, much of this is promoted by law enforcement agencies and the worrying aspect is that there is little regard for whether or not such big events actually make a difference on the street. For example, the Australian Federal Police uses seizures as the basis of its drug harms index in its bid for ever more resources. In fact the high level of seizures simply shows that there are more drugs around. Market indicators of reported plentiful supply, stable or declining prices and stable or rising purity are sure indicators that supply reduction efforts are failing to stem illicit drug supply. But this fact is rarely reported, rather the sensational story is published without the balance.

In August the *International Journal of Drug Policy* included a series of articles that supported what Families and Friends have been saying since 2001 that the heroin drought was not brought about by Australian law enforcement efforts. The articles demolish arguments underpinning the officially commissioned study that told the then Federal Government what it wanted to hear.

One of the disappointing spin offs of the back seat placement of illicit drug policy by the new Federal Government is the failure to recognise the implications of drug policy for many if not all the most intractable and costly social problems that the government is giving attention to: problems like mental health, homelessness and child protection. In respect of mental health, co-morbidity with substance abuse and other mental health problems are expectations rather than the exception. This comorbidity characterises the homeless population and those in prisons. Increasingly desperate governments around the country refuse to acknowledge what other studies show - that measures dictated by drug policy do as much if not more to undermine the capacity of drug affected parents than the drugs themselves. FFDLR has given enthusiastic support to the proposal to have the Productivity Commission consider the financial implications of drug policy. The Collins & Lapsley studies show that States and Territories incur the lions share of expenses arising from illicit drugs even though illicit drug policy is principally determined at the federal level.

In the ACT our focus has been on the new prison especially in relation to NSPs and strip searching. At time of writing the prison was almost complete with preparations for the transfer of prisoners back from NSW to commence in February – somewhat later than expected. I have been nominated to represent the ACT Coalition on Corrections on a community monitoring and evaluation group of the prison. Only a few meetings of that group have been held.

A great deal of work in respect of the Coalition has been undertaken by members of FFDLR and a significant number of public forums promoting good prison practices have been held. However while the government has promoted the prison as human rights compliant, there seems to be a limit to that claim. In the last days of the majority ALP government an amendment to the Corrections Management Act was pushed through with no community consultation. It allowed for the routine strip-searching of prisoners – a practice contrary to human rights expectations.

The ACT elections brought an end to the majority ALP government and provides a balance in the Legislative Assembly with 7 ALP members, 6 Liberal members and 4 Green members. The ALP has formed government with a signed agreement with the Greens. Members of FFDLR were saddened that Greens member Deb Foskey did not stand again at the election but we are most grateful for all her efforts in supporting our issue.

In the New Year the ACT is expected to launch a new alcohol and drug strategy, while it will have emphasis on alcohol and tobacco – because those drugs cause the greatest problems – it will nevertheless incorporate good strategies for illicit drugs. And like the 2004 - 2008 strategy just finished, its implementation and evaluation will be monitored by a joint government and community committee. Annual evaluation reports of the 2004 – 2008 strategy can be found on the department of Health's website at:

<http://health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=da&did=10133064&pid=1156381026>

The full report was presented at the FFDLR AGM on 27 November 2008