

INITIATIVES

KEY POINTS

- The Australian Government Health portfolio continues to work in close partnership with Commonwealth, state and territory health and law enforcement agencies to reduce drug related harms and improve health and social outcomes for people affected by illicit drug use.
- National Research Centres of Excellence continue to enhance law enforcement, health and regulatory agencies' understanding of the nature of Australia's illicit drug markets.
- The 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey was released on 25 November 2014 and is a comprehensive population-based survey focusing on substance use and related issues.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines some of the initiatives that reflect the Australian Government's commitment to countering the threat posed by illicit drugs. These initiatives have been developed by health authorities, law enforcement and other government and non-government agencies. This chapter outlines a variety of initiatives reported by the Commonwealth Department of Health (DoH).

NATIONAL

Since 1985, the DoH has worked in close partnership with Commonwealth, state and territory health and law enforcement agencies to address illicit drug issues under the National Drug Strategy (NDS). The DoH supports the balanced, evidence-based approach to drug issues set out in the NDS, which encompasses the three pillars of supply, demand and harm reduction. Under the current NDS, the DoH continues to deliver a range of initiatives aimed at reducing drug-related harms and improving social outcomes for individuals, families and communities affected by drug misuse.

The National Ice Action Strategy¹ was agreed to by the Council of Australian Government (COAG) on 11 December 2015. This new Strategy includes responses to a number of measures to reduce the impacts associated with drug and alcohol misuse, specifically the drug ice, to individuals, families and communities. These measures require either joint Commonwealth and state action, or Commonwealth or state only action. The National Ice Action Strategy also committed to the establishment of a new Ministerial Drug and Alcohol Forum to oversee Australia's national alcohol and other drug framework.

PRIMARY HEALTH NETWORK — DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT PROGRAM

As part of the National Ice Action Strategy further investment in drug and alcohol treatment is being provided for Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to commission additional drug and alcohol treatment services to meet local need, including for Indigenous-specific services.

PHNs have undertaken extensive drug and alcohol planning and consultation to inform the development of regional Needs Assessments and Activity Work Plans, increasing their knowledge and understanding of the local sector prior to the commissioning of drug and alcohol treatment services. Once approved, PHNs are able to finalise procurement and contracting processes and enter into contracts with drug and alcohol treatment service providers.

NATIONAL GRANTS

Established in 1997, the Non Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program provides funding to increase treatment places and improve service quality and outcomes. Funding under this program supports a number of specialised alcohol and other drug treatment options including outpatient counselling, outreach and peer support, home withdrawal services, therapeutic communities, and rehabilitation.

The Substance Misuse Service Delivery Grants Fund aims to better promote and support treatment services across Australia to provide improved health and social outcomes for individuals and communities affected by alcohol and drug use. Australian Government funding is also provided through the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvement Grants Fund to support prevention of substance misuse and to promote service improvement within the drug and alcohol and related sectors.

¹ The National Ice Action Strategy can be found at <<https://www.coag.gov.au/>>.



NATIONAL DRUGS CAMPAIGN

The National Drugs Campaign (the campaign) is a key education and prevention element of the Australian Government's contribution to the NDS. The campaign supports objectives relating to illicit drug use under the NDS, specifically to reduce the uptake of illicit drugs among young people through education and primary prevention communication strategies.

During 2015–16, the 'Ice destroys lives' campaign was launched, with phase one running from 10 May to 27 June 2015 and phase two running from 30 August to 30 September 2015. The Ice destroys lives campaign aimed to raise awareness of the harms of ice amongst high risk young people and increase the likelihood of young people avoiding the drug. The campaign activity provided a range of new advertising materials for online and social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and online videos. Evaluation of the campaign showed it to be credible, with more than 90 per cent of both youth and parents who saw the campaign indicating that they had taken some sort of action, predominantly around reinforcing existing knowledge about ice.

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

The DoH supports strategic research in the alcohol and other drugs sector by funding three National Research Centres of Excellence. Each centre has a distinct role in terms of research and advice provided to Government.

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC): situated at the University of New South Wales, focusing on research and data collection that underpins Australia's understanding of the nature and extent of drug use and harms, evidence about new and emerging treatment options and analysis of effectiveness and outcomes of drug and alcohol interventions. NDARC is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvements Grants Fund.

National Drug Research Institute (NDRI): situated at Curtin University in Western Australia, NDRI was formed in 1986 and plays a key role in national harm prevention strategies through research designed to establish the preventive potential of legislative, economic, regulatory and educational interventions.

National Centre on Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA): located within the School of Medicine at Flinders University in South Australia, the NCETA is a collaborative venture between Flinders University, DoH and the South Australian Department of Health. NCETA is focused on workforce strategies and drug and alcohol issues in the workplace, advancing the capacity of health and human services organisations and workers to respond to alcohol and drug related problems.

As part of the National Ice Action Strategy, a Centre of Excellence for the Clinical Management of Emerging Drugs of Concern will be established to undertake clinical research into new treatment options, training health professionals and evaluating treatment effectiveness. This Centre will target ice use in the first instance. The Centre is expected to commence work in early 2017.



THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS KNOWLEDGE CENTRE (KNOWLEDGE CENTRE)

In 2013, the DoH funded the development and operation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Alcohol and other Drugs (AoD) Knowledge Centre.² A key aim of the online resource is to provide increased practical support to the workforce and communities involved in efforts to reduce the impact of AoD on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through development and provision of a collection of high quality culturally appropriate resources for individuals, groups, organisations, communities and professionals.

POSITIVE CHOICES WEB PORTAL

The 'Positive Choices' online web-portal was launched in December 2015.³ Positive Choices provides access to interactive evidence-based drug education resources for parents, teachers and students. A key aim is to provide an access point nationally for information, tools, and school-based programs on illicit drugs and related harms enabling teachers and parents to provide credible and up-to-date information.

DRUG TRENDS PROGRAM

The Drug Trends Program at NDARC incorporates the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) and the National Illicit Drug Indicators Project (NIDIP). This program improves Australia's capacity to monitor changing drug patterns in a timely manner and to effectively disseminate this information to government and other stakeholders.

IDRS is a national illicit drug monitoring system intended to serve as a strategic early warning system, identifying emerging trends of local and national concern in illicit drug markets. EDRS is a national monitoring system for ecstasy and related drugs that is intended to serve as a strategic early warning system, identifying emerging trends of local and national interest in the markets for these drugs.

The aims of NIDIP are to provide epidemiological data on trends over time in drug-related harms, to complement other Australian monitoring systems such as IDRS and EDRS, and to improve the understanding of, and systematically track changes in, drug-related harms for both illicit and prescription drugs.

2013 NATIONAL DRUG STRATEGY HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The DoH commissioned the 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), the results of which were released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on 25 November 2014. The NDSHS is a comprehensive population-based survey of approximately 24 000 people in Australia aged 14 years or older. Focusing on substance use and related issues, it is the principal data collection used to monitor drug trends and evaluate prevalence of use in Australia under the NDS. Fieldwork for the 2016 NDSHS will occur in the second half of 2016.

² For further information see <www.aodknowledgecentre.net.au>.

³ For further information see <www.positivechoices.org.au>.



MEDICINAL CANNABIS

On 10 February 2016, the Australian Government introduced the Narcotic Drugs Amendment Bill 2016 (the Bill). The Bill was passed by the Australian Parliament on 24 February 2016 and the Narcotic Drugs Amendment Act 2016 (the Act) now provides the critical ‘missing piece’ for the Commonwealth to enable a sustainable supply of safe medicinal cannabis products to Australian patients in the future.

The Act provides a national licensing scheme to enable cultivation of cannabis in Australia by creating a legal supply of cannabis for incorporation into medicinal cannabis products that are safe and of appropriate quality. This means people will not have to turn to the illicit market for cannabis and it will enable appropriate medical supervision and access to pharmaceutical grade cannabis products for medical or scientific use. When accessed in accordance with the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 and relevant state and territory legislation, patients won’t be exposed to criminal prosecution, or the health risks associated with products of unknown safety and quality.

The Act will open the way for Australians with painful and chronic conditions to get access to the relief they need where this is determined by their doctor to be of potential benefit. It is important to note that the Act does not legalise the cultivation of cannabis or use of cannabis outside of regulated medical or scientific purposes. Nor is it about making cannabis products available ‘over-the-counter’ or outside of a prescription by an approved medical professional or through an approved clinical trial. The same high safety standards that are applied to any other medicine will be applied for cannabis derived products. The Act strikes the right balance between patient access, community protection and Australia’s international obligations regarding the control of narcotic drugs.

