

Is Getting Pissed Getting Pathetic?

VAADA in conjunction with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) hosted the inaugural Youth Binge Drinking forum on Monday 21 June 2004 at the Melbourne Town Hall as part of Drug Action Week®. The forum, sponsored by the Premier's Drug Prevention Council (PDPC) and the City of Melbourne, explored whether youth binge drinking is on the increase and what we should do about it.

The forum attracted significant media interest with VAADA and YACVic undertaking or facilitating presenter interviews with: 3AW, Fox FM, Mix FM, John Faine's ABC program, Kathy Bedford's regional ABC program, MX magazine, the Herald Sun, AAP and the Age newspapers.

The forum was opened by Mr Daniel Andrews MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and showcased a series of opening keynote perspectives including:

- Dr John Howard, Ted Noffs Foundation
- Professor Margaret Hamilton, national alcohol expert and member PDPC
- Mr David Crosbie, national alcohol expert
- Dr Yvonne Bonomo, researcher
- Mr Brian Kearney, alcohol industry.

Other presenters and panel sessions provided youth, rural, indigenous, parent's and community perspectives on the issue.

The forum produced a high quality of information and participant discussion, highlighting a number of issues surrounding youth binge drinking including:

- The acknowledgment that drinking is a cultural problem affecting both adults and young people and society can not continue to scapegoat youth binge drinking as the problem
- The need to implement effective harm reduction strategies that we know will work but are more difficult for the community and government

Forum discussion contributed to a number of recommendations including the need for:

- Alcohol taxation reform and pricing controls;
- Strict controls on the availability and supply of alcohol;
- Properly enforced liquor licensing laws;
- Better treatment options particularly within Indigenous and rural communities;
- Increased random breath testing on our roads;
- Further strategies to regulate sponsorship, advertising and media in relation to alcohol;
- The redirection of a percentage of excise and taxation collected on alcohol products into public health initiatives that address alcohol related harm;
- Increased social research on youth drinking and alcohol use; and
- Changes to current labelling and packaging requirements
- Making binge drinking unacceptable within the general community.

Presentations from the forum are now available on the VAADA website at www.vaada.org.au and a report will be available in coming weeks.

VAADA would like to thank our sponsors, the presenters, Terry Laidler (forum facilitator) and all those who attended.



Dr John Howard, Clinical Director, Ted Noffs Foundation, was keynote presenter at the forum

Month in Review

Politician's visits to AOD agencies

As part of Drug Action Week 2004 VAADA organised 18 visits to agencies by politicians. Many others have contacted VAADA seeking alternative appointment times and other activities. VAADA would like to thank all politicians who visited agencies during the week including:

- Senator Lyn Allison
- David Kemp, Member for Goldstein
- Anne Corcoran, Member for Issacs
- Peter Lockwood, Member for Bayswater
- Dale Wilson, Member for Narre Warren South
- Geoff Hilton, Member for Western Port Province
- Noel Pullen, Member for Higginbotham
- Gavin Jennings, Member for Melbourne Province
- Peter Ryan, Member for Gippsland South
- Kirstie Marshall, Member for Forest Hill
- Richard Dalla-Riva, Member for East Yarra
- Dianne Hadden, Member for Ballarat Province
- Andrew McIntosh, Member for Kew
- Wendy Lovell, Member for North East Province
- Steve Herbert, Member for Eltham
- Joanne Duncan, Member for Macedon
- Noel Maughan, Member for Rodney
- Damien Drum, Legislative Councillor for North Western

VAADA would like to thank all Victorian politicians who expressed an interest in the work of Victorian agencies.

A New Study into 'Party Drugs'

VAADA, in conjunction with the University of Melbourne, has undertaken a study into the use, attitudes and experiences of 'party drug' or amphetamine type substance (ATS) users. The key findings included:

- The majority of respondents reported mixing their drugs (poly-drug use)
- Higher perception of safety amongst ATS users than non users
- Most respondents who had used or were using ATS reported experiencing harms
- For those using ATS, the influence of friends and the internet in providing information was apparent

It is clear from the findings that:

- There is a need for awareness of risks and consequences of poly-drug use
- Regulation is required of the rave/club industry
- Opportunities to provide information to ATS users must be established given the perception of safety of these drugs
- Further research is required to identify the extent and nature of harms experienced by ATS users and the possible associated risks
- Given the high reliance on friends and the internet by users for information on ATS, the development of harm reduction messages is more challenging than for other drugs. An article in *The Age* newspaper on 10 June 2004 highlighted the use of SMS messaging as one way of doing this.

The report is available at www.vaada.org.au

Secretary's Partnership Forum

VAADA representatives attended the DHS Secretary's Partnership Forum in June. The forum provided the opportunity for peak bodies to raise issues with the secretary and highlight activities under the Partnership Project (on which VAADA is represented). VAADA welcomes the Secretary's strongly stated commitment to sector viability.



Peak body and senior DHS representatives (The Human Services Partnership Implementation Committee) at the Secretary's Forum

YOUR SAY

Mr Bruce Clarke,

Presenter at the VAADA/YACVic youth binge drinking forum

“Kids Like That”

In July 1998 our 14-year-old son Leigh, came home drunk. In the morning we had a word with him about the effects of alcohol on his sporting prospects and so on. He was a keen sportsman involved in tennis, football and cricket. At 13 he won our local Men’s “C” grade tennis tournament. His ambition was to be Goal Umpire in an AFL Grand Final. He should have made it.

At his 15th birthday we did not permit alcohol. We knew that parties often turned into drunken brawls. Leigh and 10 of his friends enjoyed what was later dubbed a “Cordial Party”. We turned away a couple of gatecrashers but the party was alcohol and incident free.

On August 13 1999, Leigh was attending a dance at the local Community Centre. Lorraine took him to McDonalds to meet friends. Due to some mix up, he did not meet this group and he went instead to a house with another group. There was a drinking session at this house. Alcohol (Vodka Essence) was supplied to Leigh. A 14-year-old girl brought a cask of wine. Other underage boys brought more beer. The drinking session lasted less than an hour when the group went their separate ways. Leigh was visibly intoxicated and said he was going home.

He was found two days later, dead in paddock 300 metres from this house. An inquest determined he died from “hypothermia, in a setting of severe intoxication”. A woman was charged and fined \$200 for supplying alcohol to minors. The Vodka Essence is now banned.

At some point in the supply chain, all alcohol is in the hands of an adult. Beyond that alcohol becomes available to children and therefore dangerous to them.

In Victoria it is legal for any adult to supply alcohol to any child in any residence. *Liquor Control Reform Act Section 119(5)(e)*. In NSW only parents may supply alcohol to their children.

Last year a meeting of federal and state health ministers accepted a recommendation to consider national standard laws controlling the supply of alcohol to children. The kids and parents are ignorant of the dangers or take false hope in the belief that it can’t happen to me. It can.

I became involved in *The Society Without Alcoholic Trauma*. SWAT has campaigned on issues including labelling and alcohol taxation. I have introduced an alcohol policy into our junior football club. The club is affiliated with the “*Good Sports Program*” as a zero alcohol club. I am a member of the *Community Alcohol Action Network* advisory committee. With three close friends we have instigated the *Leigh Clark Foundation* which is encouraging local junior sporting clubs to adopt alcohol free policies.

People have complimented me on my crusade and note some achievements.

Any success I achieve is born of failure, failure to guide a young man to adulthood. It is a failure of many people - parents, police, teachers, manufacturers, retailers and governments. It is a failure to put the welfare of young people above commercial or other selfish interests. Success to me carries a bitter taste.

A couple of days after Leigh was found, I was at the scene when a little old lady walked past muttering “Someone ought to do something about kids like that.” At the time I took offence at her words because Leigh was not a “kid like that.” No - that little old lady was right – someone ought to do something about kids like that.



Reply to Mark Latham’s ‘Earn or Learn’ Policy

Peak bodies and agencies involved in youth issues co-signed a letter in June in reply to Mark Latham’s announcement of the Youth Guarantee. Whilst welcoming Mr Latham’s focus on young people, significant concern was expressed about the policy implications of the ‘learning or earning-not third option’.

The letter calls for the establishment of a discrete system to support the return to work of young people with mental illnesses, new service models to promote recovery through evidence-based treatment in youth mental health and substance abuse, and formal recognition for young people who contribute to their communities through voluntary work and caring responsibilities.

Calendar of Events

1 July	<p><i>The new Victorian legislation on Inhalant use – Wyndham City Council</i> A forum focussing on the new inhalant legislation and what it means for the community. Will include presentations by the ADF Centre for Youth Drug Studies, DHS and Youth Law at Werribee Legal Service. To be held from 12-2 pm at the Wyndham Leisure and Events Centre, 80-82 Derrimut Road, Hoppers Crossing. To register contact Rebecca on 9742 8160.</p>
9 July	<p><i>Comorbidity in young people – Turning Point Talking Point Seminar Series</i> Presented by Dr Leanne Hides, ORYGEN research centre, Department of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne. Held at 142 Gertrude Street Fitzroy. Bookings essential – call Turning Point on 8413 8413 to register.</p>
20-21 July	<p><i>ANEX Harm Reduction Conference 2004</i> The 2004 Annex Harm Reduction Conference is being held on the 20th and 21st July at Rydges Hotel, Melbourne. For further information please contact ANEX on 9417 4838 or www.anex.org.au.</p>
23 July	<p><i>Child Protection and AOD Practice Issues-What Do We Need To Know – Moreland Hall Lunchtime Seminar Series</i> Presented by Stuart Oldfield Manager, DHS Child Protection Northern Region. An overview of the current direction of the Department of Human Services in regards to legislation, reporting, implications of child protection involvement and the process involved. Contact Liz to register 9384 8836 or seminars@morelandhall.org.</p>
28 July	<p><i>Working with the Vietnamese Community</i> The Vietnamese Welfare Action Network (VWAN) will be hosting a one-day conference on Working with the Vietnamese Community. The conference will be held at the Holmesglen Conference Centre, Batesford Road, Chadstone from 9.00am-4.00pm on 28th of July 2004. Registration opens at 9.00am. Conference fee: \$77 or \$55 students. Contact Tanya to register on 8792 2393 or Tanya.Houston@southernhealth.org.au.</p>
Advanced Notice: 4-6 August	<p><i>The Congress 2004 – Strategies for Equality and Inclusion</i> The Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) is hosting VCOSS Congress 2004 – Strategies for Equality and Inclusion on the 4th, 5th and 6th of August at the Victorian University Convention Centre, Melbourne. Registrations are strictly limited to 300 places each day. To register please contact the VCOSS Current Events Office on 9596 4207 or email@currentevents.com.au.</p>
Advanced Notice: 12-13 August	<p><i>Rural Alcohol and Drugs Conference 2004</i> The Warrnambool Alcohol and Drug Advisory Committee (WADAC) is hosting the 2004 Rural Victorian and Drugs Conference on the 12th and 13th of August at the Warrnambool Entertainment Centre. For further information please contact Suzan Morey on 0417 103420 or suzanm@wadac.wrad.org.au.</p>



L-R: Assoc. Prof Terry Laidler (forum facilitator) and Professor Margaret Hamilton presenting at the youth binge drinking forum.

