



## Tackling alcohol and other legal drug issues

VAADA's 2002 Conference *'Everyday Drugs, Everyday Problems: tackling alcohol and other legal drugs'* was a great success.

Keynote presenters on day one, Geraldine Moses, Brian Kearney, Todd Harper and Jack Warhaft gave delegates an excellent overview of current issues around pharmaceutical drugs, liquor licensing, smoking related harm and support for doctors who have drug and alcohol related problems.

Terry Laidler facilitated a plenary session which identified the common ground which exists between alcohol and other legal drug issues.

### Some conference feedback....

*"Thank you for an enjoyable conference. I will certainly be (strongly) encouraging our staff to support VAADA initiatives and future conferences or workshops. Thanks again, it was indeed a fantastic event."*

On day two of the conference, Cameron Boardman, Chair of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee's 'Inquiry into the Inhalation of Volatile Substances' summarised the inquiry's recommendations and provided an insight into how the Committee had arrived at, and communicated, its recommendations.

Paul Macdonald, Director of the Drug Policy and Services Unit at the Department of Human Services summarised current issues related to alcohol and drug harm in Victoria and how the Department was responding. The ensuing question session was lively and interesting, identifying a number of issues for the sector.

Conference workshops and presentations on topics as diverse as mandated clients, cultural responses, local government and benzodiazepine use provided an opportunity for delegates to explore specific sector issues.

Continuing the interactive theme of the

conference, the final plenary session included group discussion on chroming, pharmaceutical drugs, alcohol, tobacco and the role of GPs, as well as future priorities for the sector and VAADA's role in achieving these (with VAADA Board members fielding questions).

The conference received extensive media coverage with radio stations including Triple J, ABC Radio Victoria Statewide, 3RN, 774 ABC Melbourne, 3MP, Brisbane and Gold Coast radio well as the *Herald Sun* and [abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au) featuring the conference and its keynote presentations. Terry Laidler also spoke extensively about the conference themes during his program on 3AK.

One of the many positive outcomes of the conference was a strong sense of the issues which need to be addressed in this area and a strong impetus to take these issues forward. We'd like to thank everyone who attended the conference, particularly those who gave presentations and helped to make the event interesting, relevant and enjoyable. A report of the conference will be available shortly.

### VAADA Welcomes Bronwyn Pike

VAADA would like to congratulate Bronwyn Pike on her appointment as Health Minister. Given her recent experience in the Community Services portfolio, Minister Pike is well placed to respond to current issues in the alcohol and drug sector.

In her capacity as acting Health Minister, Bronwyn Pike launched VAADA's national Drug Action Week initiative in June this year. We have recently written to Minister Pike stressing the importance of progressing the recommendations of the *'Inquiry into the Inhalation of Volatile Substances.'* We look forward to meeting with the minister on this issue and working with her to progress key drug and alcohol issues in Victoria.

## December in Review

### VAADA's New FASA

VAADA recently signed a new Funding and Service Agreement with the Department of Human Services, which provides for an annual recurrent increase in VAADA's funding. We'd like to acknowledge DHS's role in supporting our work.

### ANCD Forum

Carol Bennett and Amanda Bolleter attended the Australian National Council on Drugs alcohol and drug agency consultation 'Where To From Here?'

The consultation provided a good opportunity to raise issues which are currently of concern in the sector, including needle and syringe exchange programs, the importance of sustainable funding, intensive specialist support and diversion programs and the need to address drug and alcohol use in culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

These consultations take place before each ANCD meeting and we would encourage workers in the sector to take up the opportunity to attend next time the ANCD meet in Melbourne.

### ADF Alcohol Survey

The Australian Drug Foundation recently released a survey highlighting that 70 per cent of 187 teens regarded themselves as drinkers. The survey also found that some young people are spending more than a third of their income on alcohol.

In responding to the survey on Nova FM, VAADA Executive Officer Carol Bennett said that alcohol industry promotion needed to be better regulated.

### VAADA's Annual Report

VAADA's Annual Report for 2001/2 will be available on our website shortly ([www.vaada.org.au](http://www.vaada.org.au)). Copies of the report will be sent to all VAADA members.

### SMR Mapping

VAADA is currently compiling a directory of drug and alcohol services in the South Metropolitan Region. If you would like to contribute to the content or format of the directory, please contact Amanda at VAADA.

### Drug services and the prison system ...a special issues discussion forum

Presented by VAADA in conjunction with the  
Office of the Correctional Services  
Commissioner

Wednesday 19 February, 2003  
9am – 4pm

Venue to be confirmed

This interactive forum will maximise opportunities for participants to ask questions and provide feedback to the OCSC.

#### Topics Include

Overview of the Prison System...from reception to treatment

The Victorian Prison Drug Strategy 2002  
A Perspective from the Adult Parole Board  
Drug Treatment in Prisons  
Pre and Post Release Services

For more information, contact Amanda at  
VAADA (03) 9416 0899,  
[abolleter@vaada.org.au](mailto:abolleter@vaada.org.au)

### VAADA Annual Conference



*Keynote  
Speaker Todd  
Harper  
(Executive  
Director, Quit)*

*Conference  
delegates  
discuss  
priorities for  
the sector*



*Keynote  
Speaker Brian  
Kearney  
(Liquor  
Licensing  
Commissioner  
Victoria)*



**Your Say**  
**Geraldine Moses, 2002 Australian Pharmacist of the Year**  
**'Medicines – a part of everyday life'**

Medicines are a part of everyday life for most Australians. The 1995 National Health Survey found that 92% of Australians aged 65 years and over use prescription or over the counter medicines regularly and that 74% of women and 63% of men had used prescription or over-the-counter medications in the previous 2 weeks. Other surveys show that approximately 60% of Australians use complementary or alternative medicines on a regular basis.

As the definition of a drug is 'any chemical substance taken into the body to change the physiological processes that would otherwise have occurred,' herbs, vitamins, coffee, tobacco, prescription and Over the Counter (OTC) medications, alcohol, cosmetics and maybe even food are all drugs. Of course, there are no 'good' or 'bad' drugs. Drugs are just tools, so it's the way we use them that's important.

Australia has an established and well accepted national policy on the Quality Use of Medicines (QUM), which is built upon judicious, appropriate, safe and efficacious use of medicines. However, there are still a number of misconceptions held by consumers and health professionals that threaten QUM.

Problems associated with the way we use drugs can range from spontaneous adverse drug reactions, to human error and accidents, to misuse (inappropriate use of a drug intended for therapeutic purposes) and abuse (using a drug in a manner inconsistent with social norms with the intent of altering mood or feeling).

Much misuse of medicines in Australia is due to consumer misconceptions. While there may be good reasons why our society can only provide superficial information and education about medicines to consumers, such as meeting low literacy levels, it is a major reason why consumers continue to jump to sometimes ill-informed conclusions. For example, we all know people who say things like 'prescription drugs are safer than street drugs,' 'opiates and antidepressants are addictive' and 'herbal and over-the-counter medicines carry little or no risk.'

Chronic pain patients are one group who suffer from the misconceptions and mixed messages that abound about medicines, especially narcotic analgesics. These drugs can be very effective when used appropriately, but their use is often hindered by a fear of opiates called 'opiophobia'. Fearful consumers can assume that addiction to narcotic analgesics is inevitable: "I try not to take my medication." Fearful doctors, who lack training in recognising and dealing with abuse of narcotics, make lame excuses such as "I can't prescribe you more morphine or I'll get into trouble" to avoid confronting the issue.

Misconceptions commonly surround the use of antidepressants as well. Unnecessary concern over dependence and the desire to "get off" antidepressants are major barriers to adequate treatment, especially when long term treatment (1 – 2 years) is required in most cases. Consumers are often not aware that antidepressants have no immediate effect and that there is no evidence of misuse or abuse of this type of medication (in fact, taking too many antidepressants will make you physically ill). Neuro-adaptation does occur, which will result in a withdrawal syndrome when the consumer stops using the medicine, but this does not constitute 'addiction' per se.

Shallow Consumer Medicines Information leaflets (the printed material often contained inside prescription and over-the-counter medications), non - consumer focussed packaging, limited time in consultations with GPs and media stories of wonder drugs and miracle cures all make it difficult for consumers to make accurate assessments of the benefits and risks of any kind of medication.

What is clear is that we need better consumer information about medicines. In my opinion, whilst we continue to give people superficial information about medicines, they will continue to make superficial decisions about them.

Geraldine Moses is a specialist Clinical and Drug Information Pharmacist at Mater Health Services in South Brisbane and was a Keynote Speaker at VAADA's Annual Conference 'Everyday



## Calendar of Events

12 February	<b>TRANX Training - Benzodiazepine Reduction and Withdrawal Support (including analgesics)</b> Presenter: Tomi Redman, Psychologist. Counsellor and Education and Training Officer with TRANX. 9.30am-12.30pm Community Room, St. Paul's Lutheran Community Centre, 711 Station St Box Hill (Cnr Elland Ave). \$50 plus \$5 GST. Contact Tomi Redman, (03) 9889 7355 <a href="mailto:tomi@tranx.org.au">tomi@tranx.org.au</a>
14 February	<b>TRANX Training - Advanced Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) skills for working with Anxiety Disorders</b> Presenter: Joe Bolza, Clinical Psychologist, Panic and Anxiety Disorders Assistance (PADA), specialising in Anxiety Disorders. 9.30am – 3.30pm. Community Room, St. Paul's Lutheran Community Centre, 711 Station St Box Hill (Cnr Elland Ave). Morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea will be provided. Cost: \$130 + \$13 GST. Contact Tomi Redman, (03) 9889 7355 <a href="mailto:tomi@tranx.org.au">tomi@tranx.org.au</a>
19 February	<b>Drug services and the prison system ...a special issues discussion forum</b> Presented by VAADA in conjunction with the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner. Wednesday 19 February, 2003, 9am – 4pm. Venue to be confirmed. This interactive forum will maximise opportunities for participants to ask questions and provide feedback to the OCSC. Contact Amanda Bolleter at VAADA (03) 9416 0899 or email <a href="mailto:abolleter@vaada.org.au">abolleter@vaada.org.au</a> for more information.
18 March	<b>Alcohol Training Project – Turning Point</b> One day seminar from 9.30 – 4.30. Dept. of Rural Health, 49 Graham St, Shepparton, phone 5823 4500. For more information and registration contact Sandra Roeg (03) 8413 8702 or email <a href="mailto:sandrar@turningpoint.org.au">sandrar@turningpoint.org.au</a>
19 March	<b>Alcohol Training Project – Turning Point</b> One day seminar from 9.30 – 4.30. Nange Gnulle, 40 Harley St, Bendigo, ph. 5443 7891. For more information and registration contact Sandra Roeg (03) 8413 8702 or email <a href="mailto:sandrar@turningpoint.org.au">sandrar@turningpoint.org.au</a>
26 – 28 May	<b>4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Drugs and Young People - Focusing on Solutions - The Way Forward</b> Wellington Convention Centre, New Zealand. Call for abstracts closes 6 <sup>th</sup> January 2003. For more information, contact the Conference Secretariat at the Australian Drug Foundation – (03) 9278 8101, <a href="mailto:events@adf.org.au">events@adf.org.au</a>

### Season's Greetings

We'd like to thank you for your support in 2002 and wish you all the best for a safe and happy festive season.

We look forward to working with you in 2003!

The Board and Staff of VAADA



### VAADA's Staff



L – R: Amanda Bolleter (Senior Project Officer), Lindi Martin (p/t Conference Organiser), Chris McDonnell (p/t Administrative Assistant), Litsa Roussakis (Project Officer), Carol Bennett (Executive Officer).