



## What's VAADA up to?

August proved to be another busy month for VAADA with the public release of a major report, key meetings and liaison with politician's offices, representation at various forums and continued policy work in some of VAADA's major strategic areas. The following provides a snapshot of activities.

### **'Tough on Crime versus Drug Treatment'**

VAADA released its report, *Tough on Crime versus Drug Treatment* in August with a media release criticising the rate of increase in prison beds in Victoria (the report is available on VAADA's website, [www.vaada.org.au](http://www.vaada.org.au)).

The report drew upon major international studies, state and national prison statistics and government policy papers.

The report argues for a more cost effective drug treatment approach to minor offenders who have drug related problems.

The report was well received by the sector and the media. VAADA's Executive Officer, Carol Bennett conducted a number of media interviews. Carol and VAADA's President, Neos Zavrou, also met with Minister Hulls and Minister Haemayer's offices to discuss the report and have had discussions with several politicians and their staff.

VAADA is still awaiting a promised response from Minister Haemayer's officer to the report.

VAADA is now working towards establishing a mechanism for drug sector consultation and is having discussions with the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner, about the best ways of doing this. Watch this space for further details.

### **Meeting on NIDS Treatment Grants Funding**

Carol Bennett and VAADA Board member, Gordon Storey, represented VAADA at a meeting in Canberra to discuss a new round of funding under the National Illicit Drug Strategy Treatment Grants Program.

The meeting was hosted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing with representatives from ANCD, ADCA, Commonwealth DHA State Managers, and state peak bodies.

There was considerable discussion about the merits of supporting infrastructure developed as part of the grant round and the need to ensure the allocation of some new funds for innovative new approaches to drug treatment.

The outcomes of the meeting will be considered by the Minister responsible, Trish Worth. Her decision about the direction the Commonwealth will take will be made known shortly.

### **VCOSS Congress Presentation**

Carol Bennett presented a paper at the annual VCOSS Social Policy Congress 2002, *Developing Visions for New Ways Forward*.

Carol's paper highlighted the implications of the political and media responses to the chronicling issue earlier this year.

In particular, the paper highlighted the roles of government, the media, funded non government agencies, the broader community, and VAADA's role as the peak body for the Victorian alcohol and drug sector in developing its response.

## VAADA's Annual Conference

Planning for this year's VAADA conference is well underway with a membership steering committee working to make it a worthwhile event.

This year's conference is titled: *'Everyday drugs, everyday problems: tackling alcohol and other legal drugs'*.

It will be held at the Carlton Rydges Hotel, Melbourne, and will address the major key themes of pharmaceuticals, alcohol, tobacco and other legal drugs.

A call for abstracts has been made – we look forward to receiving abstracts from across the sector. Closing date for abstracts is 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2002.

## Some key VAADA Activities

VAADA continues to be involved in representing and consulting its members through several new and ongoing activities.

The following provides some examples of VAADA's current activities:

- a consultative forum for members with Kate Redwood to provide an opportunity for VAADA members to hear about the implementation of DHS' Funded Agency Partnership Agreement.
- a number of key policy and decision making bodies: DHS Workforce Development Steering Committee, DHS Episodes of Care Review Committee and Service System Review Committee. VAADA will also be represented on the new Victorian Government Drug Initiative Evaluation Committee.
- Membership of broader bodies and partnerships including the VCOSS peak groups forum and Criminal Justice Coalition (a partnership of interest from across the social services sector).
- consultation on key policy issues eg. diversion, media reporting on drugs etc.
- Relevant forums such as local drug forums, regional drug and alcohol meetings etc.

## *Drug treatment or prison – a no brainer?*

VAADA Media Release 19 August 2002

*'Putting more and more drug users in prison is stupid'* according to Ms Carol Bennett, Executive Officer of the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA).

*'I don't know why any government would continue to waste taxpayers money putting drug users in prison when investing more in intensive drug treatment programs benefits everyone and costs less.'*

Ms Bennett was speaking at the release of a new VAADA report showing that:

- over two thirds of all prisoners have either committed their crime while under the influence of drugs or to obtain money for drugs
- prison beds cost at least double even the most intensive long term drug treatment beds and achieve much worse outcomes
- Victoria's prison population is increasing faster than any other State, having risen by around 33% in the last five years
- the average occupancy rate in Victoria's prisons has exceeded capacity by 100% leading to temporary accommodation and other inadequate responses
- over 50% of all Victorian prisoners are serving sentences of 12 months or less, mostly for minor property crime (money for drugs)
- international studies show that comprehensive drug treatment programs for offenders reduce recidivism by over 30%.

The VAADA report on 'Offenders and Drug Treatment' draws on major international studies, state and national prison statistics, and a number of government policy papers. Ms Bennett argued that the report clearly showed the government was not doing enough to get drug offenders into appropriate treatment.

# Your Say

Neos Zavrou, VAADA President

## Response to Paul McDonald (Your Say, VAADA News July 2002)

Like most people in our field, I appreciate the fact that Mr Paul McDonald (Director of Drugs Policy, Department of Human Services Victoria) took the time to provide a public response to Janet Farrow's opinion piece (*Your Say*) in the June VAADA newsletter. This level of open communication is something all of us working in the Victorian alcohol and drug sector value.

Since the mail out of the newsletter, I have received numerous phone calls both acknowledging the value of such open communication but also raising a number of concerns widely felt within the sector.

Whilst this response is not a formal VAADA position it certainly reflects the concerns raised by members with me and has the full support of the VAADA Board.

Even though the VAADA Board understands the Department's difficulty, whether an organisation is funded through the Community Support Fund (CSF) under the Turning the Tide Initiative or the Victorian Government Drug Initiative, or funded through Commonwealth funds under the Diversion Initiative or the National Illicit Drug Strategy grants, or through ongoing DHS funding, the bottom line is that costs of service provision have risen significantly in the last few years. This increase in costs exceeds CPI (particularly given recent rises in staffing costs), and the government, through whatever program, has chosen not to provide full CPI indexation to unit costs. This amounts to a real cut in service funding.

Complex financial explanations, although illuminating in terms of bureaucratic process, provide little consolation for a sector struggling to provide quality services to a marginalised client group. Janet in her letter was making this point. Service providers are constantly in contact with VAADA making this point.

Mr McDonald reiterates the position of previous and current governments that for those programs fortunate enough to be able to gain a CPI adjustment (non CSF funded programs), the government has declared a 'productivity dividend' that effectively cuts the indexation

adjustment by almost one third. I know of no alcohol and drug service in Victoria where productivity would be increased by reducing staffing or running costs. Calling a cut to services a 'productivity saving' is ridiculous.

It is government policy that certain programs are funded through the CSF and are not given any CPI adjustment. It is government policy that CPI not be fully passed on to alcohol and drug programs. The result of such policies is that services are being effectively cut as they struggle to meet increasing costs and increasing accountabilities.

While Mr McDonald noted 'that DHS passes on all CPI funds to agencies and separately funds for all wage movements,' this is not reflected in government policy or practice, and is certainly not the reality for agencies struggling to maintain quality services with limited funds and increasing costs.

At the same time, like most people in our field, I share Mr McDonald's hope that at some stage in the future all agencies in our sector will be able to achieve full CPI indexation.

Perhaps this is an area where DHS, VAADA and the field might be able to work together in achieving real change that will significantly increase real productivity through direct improvements in the quality of programs and services. I would also like to see this issue factored into discussions around the Workforce Development Strategy given that CPI and Unit Costs directly impact on the terms and conditions of staff employed in the alcohol and drug sector.

We only have to look across the border to NSW to find a drug and alcohol sector that has and does receive CPI increases to their services as a matter of course.

Most importantly, I hope here in Victoria that we will all have an opportunity to further discuss and work with the department on these fundamental issues of CPI and Unit Costs for the benefit of our services and, ultimately, our clients.

## Calendar of Events

13 September	<p><b>Talking Point Seminar – Drugs: addiction or adrenalin</b>            Rev. Tim Costello – Director, Urban Seed &amp; National President, Baptist Union of Australia            1-2pm Turning Point Training Room 142 Gertrude St, Fitzroy. Bookings essential. Ph: 8413 8413</p>
22-27 September	<p><b>Rutgers-Hazelden International School of Alcohol and Drug Studies</b>            Designed for treatment professionals. Held at Clayton. Cost US\$495            Information and enrolment is available at: <a href="http://www.hazelden.org">www.hazelden.org</a></p>
11 October	<p><b>Talking Point Seminar – Media and the drugs policy agenda: what are the relationships?</b>            John Tebbutt – Media Studies Program, La Trobe University            1-2pm Turning Point Training Room 142 Gertrude St, Fitzroy. Bookings essential. Ph: 8413 8413</p>
8 November	<p><b>Talking Point Seminar – Full speed ahead: developments in treatment for amphetamine use</b>            Dr Nicole Lee – Senior Clinical Psychologist &amp; Senior Research Fellow, Turning Point            1-2pm Turning Point Training Room 142 Gertrude St, Fitzroy. Bookings essential. Ph: 8413 8413</p>
18 – 20 November	<p><b>APSAD Alcohol and Drug Conference (incorporating the National Methadone Conference)</b>            The conference will be held in Adelaide and will place equal emphasis on licit and illicit drugs.            For further information visit: <a href="http://www.plevin.com.au/APSAD2002">www.plevin.com.au/APSAD2002</a> or phone 08 8379 8222</p>
2-3 December	<p><b>VAADA Annual Conference – Everyday Drugs, Everyday Problems: tackling alcohol and other legal drugs.</b> Call for abstracts phone 9416 0899 Venue: Carlton Rydges, Lygon Street, Carlton.</p>

### New Project Officer

VAADA welcomes a new project officer, Amanda Bolleter. Amanda commenced work on 2<sup>nd</sup> September. She joins us from the National Drug Research Institute. Amanda will take carriage of several key VAADA activities.

### VAADA Annual General Meeting

**When:** Monday 30 September 2002  
3 to 5pm

**Where:** Carlton Rydges  
701 Lygon Street Carlton  
(cnr of Lincoln Square North)  
Limited parking available – enter from Lincoln Square  
(between Grattan & Queensberry Sts)

**Nominations for Board elections close on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2002\*.**

Further details will be forwarded to members shortly.

\*(please note that nominations for board membership will not be accepted at the AGM).