



Government Launches Drugs Package Report Card

VAADA participated in the launch of the Government's two year report on its \$77 million drugs package by Health Minister John Thwaites on 22 October 2002. While welcoming some aspects of the report, VAADA expressed some concern that the Government's own report card of its performance in drug prevention and treatment did not fully reflect the reality for many working in, and accessing, specialist alcohol and drug treatment.

VAADA's Executive Officer, Carol Bennett, noted that 'the specialist drug treatment system has received less than 50% of the increased funding to the sector and continues to struggle with underpaid workers in under-resourced agencies trying to deal with some of the most complex clients in the whole health and welfare system. The total drug treatment budget is still less than 2% of all health expenditure.'

Independent national studies comparing drug treatment services have found that Victoria compares poorly in some areas to other states in Australia. Carol noted that 'the real situation confronting most people experiencing drug problems in Victoria is that the treatment system struggles to cope with people who require intensive support. Far too many Victorians are ending up in prison because the intensive treatment system is unable to provide the services they need, and they end up on the cycle of drug use and crime.'

An independent assessment which included consultation with those who work in the system, and compared Victoria's performance with that of other states, might help to build a better prevention and treatment system. At the launch of the two year report, Minister Thwaites also

announced that the Government would increase police powers in an attempt to reduce chroming in response to the release of the Parliamentary Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee's Inquiry into the Inhalation of Volatile Substances.

VAADA is hopeful that the Government will respond to the report's recommendation for enhanced specialist intensive treatment for those with complex drug problems in addition to the emphasis on increased policing.

The Government's media releases are at: <http://hnb.dhs.vic.gov.au/web/pubaff/medrel.nsf/all?OpenView> and VAADA's media releases are at: www.vaada.org.au

VAADA Special Issues Forum Drugs and Justice

Further to the level of interest expressed by members of the sector and the focus on law and order issues in the lead up to the Victorian election, VAADA is pleased to announce that it will conduct a special issues forum on drugs and justice on Wednesday 4 December 2002. The forum will follow VAADA's Annual conference on 2 & 3 December 2002. The forum will explore issues including:

- The Victorian Prison Drug Strategy
- Alternatives to imprisonment
- Drug Treatment Issues
- Health Issues (hepatitis C etc)
- Post release programs

A detailed forum program and registration form will be available shortly. In the meantime, put it in your diary.

October in Review - Alcohol in Focus

Alcohol Tax

Alcohol related issues continued to be a key focus for VAADA in October. VAADA provided a submission to the Federal Senate Economics Legislation Committee on Alcohol Excise and Taxation. The submission highlighted strong evidence that a percentage of excise and taxation collected on alcohol products should be redirected into public health initiatives to address alcohol related harm. VAADA's submission stated that excise and taxation on alcohol should be based on alcoholic content and strength rather than the cost of manufacture or the method used to produce the alcohol. VAADA recommends that indexation of alcohol excise and taxation be retained and expanded to all alcohol products. The submission is available on the VAADA web site at http://www.vaada.org.au/alcohol_excise_submission.htm. The Hansard of the inquiry hearing is available from abolleter@infoxchange.net.au.

Road Safety Bill

VAADA responded to an invitation for feedback from the Hon. Barry Bishop, M.L.C. (Member for North Western Province) on the Road Safety (Responsible Driving) Bill. The submission stated that approximately 27 percent of drivers killed in Victoria were under the influence of alcohol. VAADA supports 'on the spot' interim suspension of the licenses or permits of dangerous drink drivers as proposed by the Road Safety Bill. This proposal would serve as a disincentive, as well as reducing the potential harm which dangerous drink drivers pose to the community.

Alcohol on Campus

Following concerns raised about the Deakin University Students Association (DUSA)'s alcohol serving practices, VAADA Executive Officer, Carol Bennett, wrote to Mr Richard Searby, the Chancellor of Deakin University about the issue.

Mr Searby's response outlined the policies and practices employed by Deakin University and DUSA in ensuring that alcohol is served responsibly at DUSA events.

VAADA congratulates Deakin University and DUSA on their policies. The responsible practices reported by Deakin contrast with recent research which demonstrates that many young

adults consume alcohol at harmful levels. Similarly, a recent National Union of Students survey found that many university students, (particularly young women living in residential colleges) experience significant harms as a result of excessive alcohol consumption.

This issue highlights the difficulty of changing cultural acceptance of binge drinking by young people. It is true that some tertiary institutions are proactive and have responsible policies and practices in place. However, while alcohol consumption is promoted in almost all other aspects of popular culture (particularly those aimed at youth) it must be asked how effective these types of measures are in practice. Is it sufficient for universities to ensure that alcohol is served responsibly at their events or should they be aiming to be more proactive in addressing the culture around young people's binge drinking?

Alcohol and Young Women

Carol Bennett gave a presentation to the Catholic Social Services Victoria State Election Social Policy Themes Conference entitled '*Girlpower: tapping into a new alcohol market?*'

The presentation outlined the conflicting messages which young people, particularly young women, are given about alcohol use. The paper highlighted the view that it is difficult to expect young people to heed warnings about alcohol consumption from health authorities, parents and others when alcohol use is portrayed as desirable by sports people, women's magazines and television programs such as '*The Secret Life of Us*' and '*Big Brother*'.

VAADA's AGM

VAADA's AGM was held on 30 September 2002. Elections were held for all Board positions. The members of the new VAADA Board are Neos Zavrou (President), Rigoula Paras (Vice President), Charlie Stewart (Treasurer), Rose Vercoe (Secretary), Rodger Brough (non-metropolitan member) and metropolitan members Janet Farrow, Trevor King and Gordon Storey. The VAADA Board represents extensive experience across the drug and alcohol sector, from major treatment services to local government.

Your Say

Cameron Boardman, Chairman, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee

This month's opinion piece is written by the Hon. Cameron Boardman, M.L.C., the Liberal member for Frankston and Chairman of the Victorian Parliament's Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee.

In September this year, the Committee published its Final Report on the Inquiry into the Inhalation of Volatile Substances. VAADA and many other groups in the sector made comment on the report at the time of its release and the report generated a significant amount of media interest. The full report is available at: http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/dcpc/current_inquiries/volatile_substances.htm.

The inhalation of volatile substances is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon. Sadly, during the course of this Inquiry, and subsequent to the publication of its Final Report, this fact has not always been appreciated. Unfortunately, some elements of the media when initially reporting on this matter did show a lack of understanding of the complexity of the issues and the ways in which to address them. Whether this is because they commented prematurely or were faced with difficult deadlines that did not allow sufficient time to read and digest the report is unclear. Admittedly, the Report is long, but this is a testament to its comprehensiveness, possibly the most thoroughly researched of its kind in Australia, if not internationally.

In order to achieve this task, the Committee was fortunate to have the input and assistance of many community and voluntary agencies associated with this form of substance abuse. It is therefore appropriate to take this opportunity to thank the hundreds of individuals, community and government agencies and other groups, including VAADA, who assisted with this task. Nonetheless it is important that the agencies and individuals involved read and study the Committee's Final Report thoroughly to maximise their awareness.

It is crucial that if beneficial outcomes are to result from this Inquiry then the Committee's recommendations must be initiated in full. It is therefore encouraging that there have already been moves towards implementing some of the findings, however, I must re-iterate that any future policy has to encompass all of the findings in order to achieve such beneficial outcomes.

First, any response to volatile substance abuse, and arguably any form of substance abuse, must be led and co-ordinated at a national level. Substance abuse in the twenty-first century is without borders, and international examples clearly suggest that the best successes are led at the national level.

Second, the States must adopt national protocols and implement State-based coordinating committees to ensure that the resources provided fully meet their intended purpose. Competition between State governments, and their agencies, must stop. Finally, although the Committee's recommendations in regard to changes to legislation, education, research, partnerships and programs for specific groups are based on the best possible information available at the moment, ongoing research must be conducted. The people who are affected by volatile substance abuse deserve the support of those in a position to bring about constructive changes. The Committee welcomes new initiatives into addressing inhalant abuse from both the government and community sector alike. I do, however, sound a note of warning. It is essential that a comprehensive approach be taken to this problem that does not isolate or address only one specific aspect of the Committee's recommendations. Agencies and government must work in tandem to ensure a comprehensive, all of community approach is adopted that prevents those affected by this type of abuse 'falling through the cracks'.

Cameron Boardman

October 2002

Calendar of Events

8 November	<p><i>Talking Point Seminar – Full speed ahead: developments in treatment for amphetamine use</i> Dr Nicole Lee – Senior Clinical Psychologist & Senior Research Fellow, Turning Point 1-2pm Turning Point Training Room 142 Gertrude St, Fitzroy. Bookings essential. Ph: 8413 8413</p>
11 November	<p><i>Yarra Drug and Health Forum</i> Forum at Collingwood Children's Inner City Farm, with presentations from DHS Northern funded programs. 11th November, 11am till 2pm. St Hellier's St. Abbotsford. RSVP by 7th November to Jo Snow, YD & HF, 9416 2459.</p>
18 November	<p><i>TRANX Training</i> Benzodiazepine reduction and withdrawal support (including analgesics). St Paul's Lutheran Community Centre. 711 Station St, Box Hill (cnr Elland Ave) Cost \$50 plus \$5 GST. 9.30am-12.30pm. Call 03 9889 7355, or email tomi@tranx.org.au</p>
18 – 20 November	<p><i>APSAD Alcohol and Drug Conference (incorporating the National Methadone Conference)</i> The conference will be held in Adelaide and will place equal emphasis on licit and illicit drugs. For further information visit: www.plevin.com.au/APSAD2002 or phone 08 8379 8222</p>
27 November	<p><i>National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre – Annual Symposium</i> The symposium will focus on focus on new research being carried out at the Centre. Contact Paul Dillon (02) 9385 0226 p.dillon@unsw.edu.au</p>
2-3 December	<p><i>VAADA Conference – Everyday Drugs, Everyday Problems : tackling alcohol and other legal drugs</i> Call for registrations – contact vaada@infoxchange.net.au or phone 9416 0899. Venue: Carlton Rydges Hotel, Carlton.</p>
4 December	<p><i>VAADA Special Issues Forum: Drugs and Justice</i> A detailed forum program and registration form will be available shortly. In the meantime, contact vaada@infoxchange.net.au or phone 9416 0899 to express your interest.</p>
4 December	<p><i>Pharmacotherapies Training Project – Turning Point</i> One day seminar, from 9.30 – 4. Sundowner Swan Hill 404 – 415 Campbell St Swan Hill. Free. Contact Malcolm Doreian on 8413 8721 to register</p>
11 December	<p><i>Pharmacotherapies Training Project – Turning Point.</i> One day seminar, from 9.30 – 4. Wangaratta Gateway, 29 – 37 Ryley St Wangaratta. Free. Contact Malcolm Doreian on 8413 8721 to register.</p>
26 – 28 May 2003	<p><i>Advance Notice: 4th International Conference on Drugs and Young People</i> Wellington Convention Centre, New Zealand. For more information, contact the Conference Secretariat, Australian Drug Foundation, phone (03) 9278 8101 or email events@adf.org.au</p>

News of the Month

A Chinese man who uncorked a bottle containing a popular beverage of spirits mixed with a snake that had been pickled for a year got a nasty surprise when the snake jumped up and bit him on the neck. (*The Age*, October 17, page 1).