

Introduction

Emerging data on drug trends indicates that illicit drug use in Australia is increasing, drugs are becoming cheaper and more readily available. The social, health and economic costs of harmful drug use are also increasingly recognised. There is a strong community sentiment that the drug problem needs to be addressed in innovative and far-reaching ways. To this end, Australia has adopted a carefully balanced approach to dealing with the problem of illicit drugs, targeting drug importation, assisting people who are addicted to illicit drugs, and educating young Australians about the risks of using drugs. Governments at all levels are addressing the illegal drug trade and use through both coordinated efforts and individual measures.

Since 1985, when the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse was introduced, Australia has pursued an approach that aims to manage the diverse health, social and economic consequences of drug use through comprehensive and consistent policies of 'harm minimisation' and supply and demand reduction. This is currently manifested in the National Drug Strategic Framework and the National Illicit Drug Strategy. Cooperation is a central plank of the efforts of Australia's law enforcement agencies to restrict the supply of drugs into Australia. Australian Governments have a history of working together and implementing coordinated strategies to address the drug problem. Australia has also adopted a collaborative approach on the international level and is a key player in the fight against drugs in the Asia/Pacific region. The Australian Government seeks to target cultivation, production, transit, distribution and supply networks as part of its National Illicit Drug strategy.

The social and economic costs of drugs in Australia

The harmful use of licit and illicit drugs has many social, health and economic impacts on Australian society. Nearly one in five deaths in Australia is drug related. It was estimated that in 1998 approximately 22 500 Australians would die either directly or indirectly as a result of harmful drug use. Further, 175 000 Australians would be hospitalised for conditions that are the result of harmful drug use (Single & Rohl 1997).

The economic cost of illicit drug use is also high. One estimate suggests that the cost of prevention, treatment, loss of productivity in the workplace, property crime, theft, accidents and law enforcement activities associated with drugs is as much as \$18 billion annually (Collins and Lapsley, 1996). Added to this are the social consequences of drug misuse, such as family breakdowns, suicide, and the pain and suffering caused by illicit drug users to both themselves and others which are not measured.

Australia's drug policies from a law enforcement perspective

At the national level, there are a number of strategies targeted at tackling the drug problem, particularly the illicit drug problem, in Australia. Both the National Drug Strategy and the National Illicit Drug Strategy are Commonwealth Government policies based on the principles of supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction. A number of organisations and initiatives have been developed under the umbrella of, or in conjunction with, these two policies as well as at the State level and by law enforcement agencies.

The National Drug Strategy

In 1993, the National Drug Strategy replaced the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse. Although the campaign had been hailed as a major achievement in drug policy, evaluations suggested that there was a need for, inter alia, improved strategic direction and closer cooperation between the agencies responsible for law enforcement and health. The National Drug Strategy was introduced to redress this and build on the campaign's strengths. The basis of the National Drug Strategy is a partnership between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, to minimise the harmful effects of drugs and drug use on Australian society.

The two key features of the National Drug Strategy are that it is a cooperative approach, which promotes participation and collaboration across Federal, State and Territory jurisdictions, and that it is a multi-dimensional approach, which demands increased cooperation among the agencies responsible for drug policy. This ensures that policies and programs across agencies responsible for health, law enforcement and education, among others, are consistent and complementary.

An evaluation of the National Drug Strategy was commissioned in 1997 with a view to informing the development of future national approaches to drugs in Australia. The evaluation concluded that the National Drug Strategy is widely recognised as one of the most progressive and respected drug strategies in the world (Single and Rohl 1997).

The National Drug Strategy Unit, within the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care's Population Health Division, manages the National Drug Strategy. Working as the overall coordination body for the Strategy, the Unit is involved in policy development, monitoring and evaluation, research, and provision of secretariat support for bodies such as the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy and the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs.

The National Illicit Drug Strategy

In November 1997 the Prime Minister announced the Government's National Illicit Drug Strategy—also known as the 'Tough on Drugs' Strategy—which forms the next major phase of the National Drug Strategy and is designed to deliver a balanced and integrated approach to reducing the supply of and demand for illicit drugs. Additional funds were promised to the Strategy in March 1997 and in the September 1998 federal election campaign. The result was a total commitment of \$295 million, including \$170.3 million for supply reduction initiatives.

The National Illicit Drug Strategy is a multifaceted approach, which attacks the illegal drug problem by:

- reducing supply through providing law enforcement agencies with extra resources to protect Australia's borders and its communities from illicit drug supplies;
- reducing demand by educating young Australians and the wider community about the extreme dangers of drugs;
- establishing a national drug treatment network across Australian cities and rural centres to bring treatment and support within the reach of those individuals who need it;
- funding and disseminating research into drug addiction.

The National Drug Strategic Framework 1998–99 to 2002–03

In response to the 1997 National Drug Strategy evaluation, the National Drug Strategic Framework was endorsed in November 1998 by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, the forum of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for health and law enforcement matters.

The National Drug Strategic Framework is a strategy to reduce the harm caused by drugs in our community, which promotes partnerships between health, law enforcement, education and non-government sectors to address the problems resulting from misuse. It presents a shared vision, a structure for cooperation, and a basis for coordinated action to reduce the harm caused by drugs in Australia. The National Drug Strategic Framework maintains the policy principles of the previous phases of the National Drug Strategy and it adopts the major recommendations of the evaluation of the previous strategy.

The document reflects the decision of the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy that a nationally coordinated and integrated approach to reducing the harm arising from the use of licit and illicit drugs, including alcohol, tobacco and pharmaceutical drugs, should continue for another five years. This includes a commitment to reduce both the supply of and demand for illicit drugs. The National Drug Strategic Framework reaffirms Australia's commitment to harm minimisation as the basis for approaches to harmful drug use nationally; embodies broad strategic directions and principles; and strengthens partnerships and seeks to expand them at all levels and between all relevant sectors.

The National Drug Strategic Framework is to be accompanied by a series of National Drug Action Plans, which will specify priorities for reducing the harm arising from the use of licit and illicit drugs; strategies for taking action on these priorities; and performance indicators. The Action Plans are being developed by the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs together with the Australian National Council on Drugs, and will be reviewed and reported against annually. The Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs will develop priorities for and coordinate the development, implementation and evaluation of the plans, with assistance from the national expert advisory committees and support from national research centres.

Consultative and advisory structures

The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy

The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy is the peak ministerial policy and decision-making body in relation to illicit and licit drugs and is responsible for overseeing the National Drug Strategy. Its membership comprises Commonwealth, State and Territory health and law enforcement ministers. This representation reflects the National Drug Strategy's emphasis on an appropriate balance between activities directed at reducing the demand for drugs, reducing drug-related harm to individuals and the community, and controlling the supply of drugs.

The Australian National Council on Drugs

Both the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy and the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs work closely with the Australian National Council on Drugs, which was instituted by the Prime Minister on 16 March 1998 and has a broad membership—representatives of volunteer and community organisations, law enforcement, education, health and social

welfare interests. The Council facilitates the partnership between the government, non-government and community sectors in the development and implementation of policies and programs designed to mitigate drug-related harm.

The Council provides to the Ministerial Council independent strategic advice on drug-related matters, including the implementation and evaluation of the National Illicit Drug Strategy.

The Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs

The Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs (previously known as the National Drug Strategy Committee) is made up of senior government officials representing health and law enforcement in each Australian jurisdiction. It provides policy advice to ministers on the full range of drug-related matters and is also responsible for implementing policies and programs as directed by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy. The Committee prioritises and coordinates the activities of the national expert advisory committees on behalf of the Ministerial Council.

Advisory structures supporting the National Drug Strategy

Under the National Drug Strategic Framework, a number of national expert advisory committees have been established to provide advice to the Ministerial Council on specific substances or issues, such as alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and school-based drug education. Among these advisory committees are the following.

The National Expert Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs

The role of the National Expert Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs is to provide—to the Australian National Council on Drugs and the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs and through these bodies to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy—high-level expert advice on priorities and strategies for tackling illicit drug problems; this includes developing priorities and strategies for prevention, education, supply control, law enforcement, treatment and rehabilitation. A current priority of the Committee is the development of the National Illicit Drug Action Plan 1999–2000 to 2002–03.

The National Drug Research Strategy Committee

The National Drug Research Strategy Committee was established in May 1999 as a coordination committee under the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs. Its role is to manage the development of the National Drug Research Strategy, which will describe nationally agreed research priorities and an effective process for dissemination of research results.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Coordination Committee

The Monitoring and Evaluation Coordination Committee provides to the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs high-level expert advice on the development of a National Drug Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. This Strategy will measure the performance of the National Drug Strategic Framework, identify emerging challenges and changing trends in harmful drug use, and communicate to government and the community the successes, problems and challenges of the National Drug Strategy.

National Expert Advisory Committee on Tobacco

The National Expert Advisory Committee on Tobacco provides advice to both the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs and the Australian National Council on Drugs, and through these bodies to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, on all matters relating

to tobacco and smoking. The Committee has developed a draft National Tobacco Strategy 1999 to 2002–03, which incorporates the National Tobacco Action Plan. These draft documents were released for public comment and consultation during January-March 1999. A revised draft was developed in light of the outcomes of the consultative process.

National Expert Advisory Committee on Alcohol

The National Expert Advisory Committee on Alcohol provides advice to both the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs and the Australian National Council on Drugs. Through these bodies advice is provided to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, on all matters relating to alcohol and drinking. At the end of 1999 the Committee were developing a draft National Alcohol Action Plan, which is expected to be completed in 2000.

National Advisory Committee on School Drug Education

The National Advisory Committee on School Drug Education released the National School Drug Education Strategy in May 1999. The Strategy was developed in consultation with education, health, law enforcement, parent groups and community organisations.

Initiatives in 1998–99

Council of Australian Governments

A meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in April 1999 agreed on the need for a national approach to address the problems of illicit drug use in Australia. The COAG agreed to expand the National Illicit Drug Strategy to enhance prevention, early intervention and education initiatives. The Commonwealth Government committed \$220.5 million over four years to fund the new initiatives. State and Territory Governments agreed to maintain their existing health and education funding, and to accommodate the necessary changes to law enforcement practices in their jurisdiction.

The centrepiece of the COAG initiatives is the Illicit Drugs Diversion Strategy, to which \$111.5 million has been allocated. The diversion strategy aims to move some drug offenders into assessment and treatment, and to divert them from entering the criminal justice system. It complements and expands a number of existing State and Territory approaches. The target group for the diversion strategy will be those who have committed minor drug offences and who have had little or no previous contact with the criminal justice system for drug offences.

Additional diversion measures include the development of cannabis cessation strategies for adults; increased community-based programs; augmenting the existing community-wide education and information campaign; additional funding for the Community Partnerships Initiative; diversification of existing needle and syringe programs; and investigation into the accessibility of and barriers to treatment.

Heads of Government agreed on the adoption of a number of 'Tough on Drugs in Schools' measures. These initiatives focus on strengthening the attack on drug dealers and increasing the capacity of schools and school communities to respond to illicit drug use. Specific measures include the development of enhanced protocols at the national level for addressing drug use in the school environment; and the provision of educational and resource materials to all schools for building school and community awareness.

A number of prison reform measures were also endorsed at the Special Meeting of the COAG. Jurisdictions agreed to develop and fund programs to intercept the supply of drugs to prisons, be tough on dealers within prisons and to develop and trial diversionary treatment programs within the gaol system so that dependent users can break this addiction.

Supply Reduction Initiatives

In response to new technology and increased money laundering opportunities, the COAG also agreed on the need for further strengthening the attack on the supply of drugs using a number of strategies, including through legislative changes such as amendments to the (*Proceeds of Crime Act 1987*). Other supply reduction initiatives include enhanced telephone interception capacity; expansion of the Law Enforcement Cooperation Program outside the Asia/Pacific region; and improvements to the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre to improve capture and analysis of financial intelligence. The expansion of Australia's capacity to intercept drugs overseas will be strengthened through greater encouragement of crop eradication and expansion of the Australian Federal Police overseas liaison network.

The supply reduction, or law enforcement initiatives funded under the COAG agreement (a total of \$41.6 million) during 1998–99 range across a number of areas and include: increased coastal surveillance; and enhanced law enforcement agencies' communication and information technology capabilities. Funds were allocated for the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, the National Heroin Signature Program, further Customs intelligence analysts, a cargo profiling system, expansion of the Blade National Taskforce (the Australian coordinated law enforcement response to South East Asian Organised Crime), the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering Secretariat and for the Australian Institute of Criminology. A total of \$41.6 million over four years was allocated to fund the new initiatives.

Demand Reduction Initiatives

A number of demand reduction initiatives have also been adopted under the COAG agreement and the National Illicit Drug Strategy. More than \$303 million has been allocated for measures designed to reduce demand, covering five priority areas. These include— treatment of users of illicit drugs, including identification of best practice; the prevention of illicit drug use; training and skills development for front line workers who come into contact with drug users or at-risk groups; monitoring and evaluation, including data collection and research.

Development and implementation of these initiatives is occurring in consultation with the Australian National Council on Drugs, State and Territory Governments, non-government organisations and the community sector.

Tough on Drugs in Sport Strategy

In May 1999, the Federal Government released its 'Tough on Drugs in Sport' strategy with a \$5.9 million package containing anti-doping measures (including research into improved detection methods), education, and preventing the importation of banned substances into Australia. Key measures include increased drug testing – both in and out of competition – and an education campaign to inform athletes of the risks involved. The strategy maps out 33 key actions covering legislation, policy, research, education, and international regulatory initiatives to combat doping in sport.

National Supply Reduction Strategy for Heroin and Other Illicit Drugs

In November 1998 the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy requested the integration of two strategy reports; the National Heroin Supply Reduction Strategy and the National Supply Reduction Strategy for Illicit Drugs other than Heroin. As a result the Australasian Police Ministers' Council, in conjunction with the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, produced the National Supply Reduction Strategy for Heroin and other Illicit Drugs. While the initiative emphasises the importance of law enforcement measures to reduce the supply of illicit drugs, it acknowledges the necessity of a balanced law enforcement, health and education approach to tackling the drug problem.

New South Wales Drug Summit 1999

The New South Wales Drug Summit was held in May 1999. At this forum, Members of New South Wales Parliament, drug experts, parents, former drug users and community leaders met to decide how best to tackle the drug problem. Eleven working groups developed recommendations for consideration by delegates to the Summit. The Summit endorsed 20 principles and 172 recommendations, including a number of innovative methods of fighting the drug problem, such as safe injecting rooms. From the Summit, the New South Wales Government's Plan of Action was developed. Recommendations covered areas including treatment and health services, youth and drug abuse, drug prevention, drugs and crime, law enforcement, drugs in rural and regional areas, and training skills.

There were a number of recommendations made in relation to crime, law enforcement and illicit drug use. These included:

- review all research to determine best practices in diversion and the best points of intervention;
- identify, clarify and formalise existing police discretionary powers to caution minor drug offenders;
- amend the *Young Offenders Act 1997* (NSW) to cover minor drug offences, allowing for warnings, cautions and conferencing;
- formalise and develop protocols to govern prosecutorial discretion relating to police powers to caution people who commit minor drug offences involving cannabis;
- remove gaol penalties for possession and use of small quantities of cannabis, cultivation of a small number of plants, or possession of implements used to administer cannabis;
- that reducing the aggregate social harm caused by drug use be the main objective of drug legislation and policing;
- that consideration be given to the feasibility of having legislated principles to guide police in exercising discretion in illicit drug enforcement;
- that action be taken to ensure better cooperation between the law enforcement, health and social services sectors in a wide range of areas;
- that research be undertaken in areas such as economic models of the drug industry, the cost-effectiveness of incarceration and its alternatives, the cost-effectiveness of interventions for prisoners, and the cost-effectiveness of law enforcement, prevention and treatment strategies to reduce drug-related harm;
- that a national approach to legislative control of the supply of pseudoephedrine and other precursor chemicals used in the manufacture of illegal drugs be developed;
- that a children's drug court be trialed and evaluated;

- that legislation dealing with the confiscation of proceeds of crime be reviewed.

The Non-government Organisation Treatment Grants Program

The Non-government Organisation Treatment Grants Program provided funding to Non-government Organisations to establish and operate new services and expand existing services for treating illicit drug problems, with a particular emphasis on filling geographic and target group gaps in the coverage of existing treatment services. Following a national selection process, 129 organisations were granted funding amounting to \$54.3 million.

Best practice in the provision of treatment for users of illicit drugs

This component of the National Illicit Drug Strategy involves the identification, promotion and dissemination of best practice in the treatment of illicit drug dependence. A series of activities will be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of social support for clients in treatment, deal with dual dependency, update resources, and develop specific consumer and prescriber information.

The Community Partnerships Initiative

The Community Partnerships Initiative is modeled on the World Health Organisation's Global Initiative on Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse and has a number of components, among them grant funding, State-based workshops, and the development of two self-directed learning kits—one for the broader community and the other for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Following the first funding round, 24 projects were funded, totalling \$1.9 million. The projects range from community development to training schemes, peer education programs for parents and young people, information dissemination, and resource production.

The Australian Drug Information Network

The Australian Drug Information Network is a national drug information service with the task of disseminating drug information to the general community (via a 1300 telephone service and a website), including parents, schools, health professionals and health care facilities. It is anticipated the service will commence in 2000.

The National School Drug Education Strategy

The National School Drug Education Strategy strengthens the provision of educational programs and supportive environments that contribute to the goal of 'no illicit drugs in schools'. This goal is based on the belief that illicit and other unsanctioned drug use in schools is unacceptable and the focus will be on educational outcomes. Helping students with drug-related problems and discouraging the presence and use of unsanctioned drugs in schools will also be important. A priority of the Strategy is recognition of, and integration with, existing school initiatives in the States and Territories.

Evaluation of trials of alternative pharmacotherapy opioid treatment

The evaluation of trials of alternative pharmacotherapy opioid treatment will contribute to the national effort to develop a range of effective, evidence-based best-practice pharmacotherapy treatment options for people who are opioid dependent. It will involve a number of planned or current pharmacotherapy trials that have been specifically nominated and supported by the States and Territories.

Reporting of illicit drug use

Funding has been allocated to develop and implement the National Coroners Information System (Illicit Drug Module), the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, the National Illicit Drug Reporting System, a national minimum data set, and a study to estimate numbers of heroin users.

The National Health and Medical Research Council

The National Health and Medical Research Council aims to conduct research into new ways of preventing and treating illicit drug use. The research agenda includes the following strategic focus areas:

- development of an action plan to design and fund a large-scale longitudinal study of illicit drug use;
- secondary analysis of primary illicit drug data sets;
- research on different treatment models' population impact and client outcomes;
- comparative analysis of service systems' treatment models;
- heroin overdoses;
- evaluation of diversion treatment;
- evaluation of family-based approaches.

The international framework

Australia is committed to a concerted international effort to curb drug abuse and trafficking in illicit drugs. It recognises the importance of building effective partnerships internationally to augment efforts to reduce drug use around the world. Australia is a signatory to several international agreements that involve the assumption of certain responsibilities and have implications for domestic policy formulation.

There are three major international drug control treaties: the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol; the Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1972; and the Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988.

Two international organisations under the umbrella of the United Nations are designed to regulate and control both licit and illicit drugs: the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs; and the International Narcotics Control Board. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme coordinates all international drug control activities.

The Conventions

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, combats drug abuse by requiring parties to limit the possession, use, trade, distribution, import, export, manufacture and production of drugs exclusively for medical and scientific purposes. It provides varying levels of control for several categories of drugs.

The Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971 establishes an international control system for psychotropic (mind altering) substances. Schedule I contains drugs with THC, LSD and mescaline. Schedule II includes amphetamines and Schedules III and IV comprises of barbiturates.

The Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988 establishes wide ranging measures to combat drug trafficking, including prohibitions on money laundering, the diversion of precursor chemicals and controlled deliveries.

The Organisations

The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs is a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is the principal drug policy-making body of the United Nations. It was established in 1946 and Australia is one of the 53 members of the Commission, which meet annually in Vienna in March. Australia has used its membership of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs to protect and advance its interests in international drug control issues and assist in the formulation of international policy on supply and demand reduction. The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs has also been an important forum for the protection and promotion of Australia's licit opiate industry.

The International Narcotics Control Board was established under the Single Convention in 1961 and is the independent and quasi-judicial control body of the United Nations. Each of the 13 members of the Board serves in their personal capacity. The Board's primary function is to promote compliance with the drugs treaties. The Board does this by monitoring the licit manufacture, international trade and legitimate use of drugs and by identifying weaknesses in national and international control systems.

The United Nations International Drug Control Program was established in 1990 to coordinate all UN drug control activities and it provides both advice and secretariat services to the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board. The Dublin Group consists of major donors to the United Nations International Drug Control Program and was developed to facilitate informal discussion between the United Nations International Drug Control Program and member states, to avoid duplication. The Dublin Group is not a formal subsidiary of the United Nations International Drug Control Program and has no executive powers.

International initiatives in 1998-99

The UN General Assembly held a special session on the global illicit drug problem in New York from 8 to 10 June 1998. The Session signalled the emergence of a new era, with the General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Demand Reduction. The overwhelming message from the Session is that all countries are now recognising the importance of adopting a balanced approach to illicit drugs, one that gives equal priority to measures to reduce demand and those to reduce supply.

The Declaration sets numerous challenges for all member states of the United Nations in the next decade. Through it, member states have pledged a sustained political, social, health and educational commitment to investing in demand-reduction programs that will contribute towards:

- reducing public health problems;
- improving individuals' health and wellbeing;
- promoting social and economic integration;
- reinforcing family systems;
- making communities safer.

Australia is pleased to have been able to make a valuable contribution to the development of the Declaration on Demand Reduction. An Action Plan to guide the Declaration's implementation was endorsed by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 1999, and again Australia was able to contribute to its development. The Action Plan acknowledges the sovereignty of states, human rights and fundamental freedoms and allows for a flexible approach, to reflect the uniqueness of each country.

The special session also endorsed plans of action for amphetamines and precursor chemicals, judicial cooperation, money laundering, alternative development, and illicit drug crop eradication. Member states committed themselves to achieving a number of significant and measurable results by the years 2003 and 2008. Among the targets set are the following:

- eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit manufacture, marketing and trafficking of psychotropic substances (including synthetic drugs) and the diversion of precursors by 2008;
- adopting national money-laundering legislation by 2003;
- achieving significant and measurable results in the field of demand reduction by 2008;
- eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by 2008.

Other achievements in 1998–99

The Australasian Conference on Drugs Strategy— 'Lets Get it Right Together'

The Australasian Conference on Drugs Strategy—'Lets Get it Right Together'—held in Adelaide from 27 to 29 April 1999, was the first conference of its kind in this country. It brought together representatives of health, social services and law enforcement agencies with the aim of developing a common approach to the illicit drug problem in Australia. Over 60 presentations were made, highlighting problems and successes to date and looking at new ways of reducing the harm and crime related to illicit drug use.

The Conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and the South West Pacific Region

The 1999 Conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and the South West Pacific Region, with the theme 'Drug Law Enforcement: facing the realities', was held in Darwin from 24 to 28 May. The Director of the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence presented a strategic assessment which outlined the major trends and issues in the illicit drug trade, as they affect law enforcement, as well as the initiatives and programs already in operation to minimise the effects of the illicit drug trade.

One of the main resolutions to come out of the Conference was for the establishment of a Commissioners Drug Policy Sub-committee comprising four commissioners. The role of the Sub-committee is as follows:

- to provide strategic advice to the Commissioners Conference;
- to act on matters referred to it by the Commissioners Conference;
- to directly represent the views of Commissioners in the national and Australasian drugs arena;
- to promote funded research in priority areas.

The question of sharing drug-related information between law enforcement agencies resulted in several conference resolutions—for example, endorsing the need to produce regular drug assessments at national, jurisdictional and regional levels; that drug-related intelligence be shared between agencies through the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, and that existing liaison between drug units be reviewed to maximise cooperation. Creating better partnerships, within law enforcement and between other health and social services agencies, is intended to achieve better results in the prevention and reduction of drug-related harm.

Australian overview for 1998–99

According to the 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (AIHW 1999), cannabis use has continued to rise. Domestically cultivated heads and hydroponic cannabis are very popular among recent cannabis users. This has probably resulted in a decline of cannabis importations, with 52.06 kilograms being detected in 1998–99. Concern has been expressed about a reported increase in the potency of cannabis available in Australia. There are anecdotal accounts of increased psychosomatic problems, but scientific evidence is lacking about the actual THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) content of the cannabis. A systematic program of scientific testing is needed.

Public concern about heroin remains high. Use of the drug appears to have increased to some extent since 1995, although surveys show that the level remains below one per cent of the population. The age of first use is falling—more teenagers have been recorded as using—and the number of fatal overdoses is increasing. Despite a record amount of heroin seized during 1998–99, there was little evidence of any decrease in availability until the end of the period, when shortages (which may prove temporary) were noted in some areas.

Estimated production of opium in Southeast Asia—the source of most of Australia's heroin—fell for the second consecutive year, while production in Afghanistan rose markedly. If this trend continues, it will raise questions about the future source of Australia's supply of heroin and the possible need to adjust strategies to combat heroin importation.

Amphetamines and methylamphetamines are the second most commonly used illicit drug in Australia, and their use continued to increase. Most of these substances are manufactured in Australia: the number of clandestine laboratories detected rose by 36 in 1998–99, to 131, most of them being in Queensland. Purity levels generally remained low. The more potent crystalline methylamphetamine hydrochloride 'ice' is imported, as is most MDMA (ecstasy). In Asia production of methylamphetamines, including ice and some ecstasy, is increasing. In 1998–99 the amount of ecstasy detected at the Australian Customs border was the highest recorded, at 89.6 kilograms. Methylamphetamine ('ice') seizures increased by 107 per cent: 21 of the 27 consignments originated in Asian countries. A major seizure of some 7.4 kilograms of 'ice' in Perth in the first half of 1999–2000 indicates a continuation of this trend.

Apart from occasional anecdotal accounts, there is no evidence of an increase in cocaine use in the general Australian population. There has, however, been an increase in injecting cocaine use in Sydney, mainly among dependent intravenous drug users. Cocaine supply appears to be meeting world demand, despite a further decline in production in South America, and in Australia in 1998–99 cocaine-related arrests rose by 26 per cent on the 1997–98 level. Importations detected at the Customs border have increased since the mid-1990s; this is particularly notable for New South Wales, where Sydney appears to have the highest level of use and is the hub for distribution to other parts of the country. A record seizure near Coffs Harbour in late 1998 and two other large shipments intercepted overseas add to the conflicting indicators about the size of the Australian cocaine market.

In Australia anabolic-androgenic steroids are mostly used by body-image conscious groups, especially males and especially those involved in competitive body building, working in the fashion or entertainment industries, or who are 'occupational users' such as security personnel. Elite athletes are probably the best known group

of users: even though this group is smaller than the body-image group, much more attention has been given to the use of performance-enhancing drugs in competitive sports. In the lead-up to the 2000 Olympic Games several legislative changes have been made to deal with the problem of illicit steroid supply (see Chapter 6).

The crackdown on drugs in sport has led to the establishment of an independent international anti-doping agency as an outcome of the World Conference on Doping in Sport, held in Switzerland in February 1999. This new agency has the task of tightening drug-testing procedures, conducting research, and promoting preventive and educational programs. The Anti-Doping Code, which the International Olympic Committee adopted at the Conference, will come into effect on 1 January 2000. Increased penalties will apply to athletes, coaches and officials found violating the Code (International Olympic Committee 1999).

Another initiative concerned with reducing drugs in sport is the Australian Government's development of the 'Tough on Drugs in Sport' Strategy in May 1999. The Strategy covers matters such as legislation, policy, research, education and detection of banned substances, and the prevention of the importation of banned substances into Australia (Australian Sports Drug Agency 1999).

The 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey also showed an increase in the use of LSD and other hallucinogens. This contrasts with law enforcement data, which show low detection and arrest rates. LSD is produced in the form of tiny tabs that are easily concealed and transported. Given its relatively low price in comparison with other illicit drugs such as ecstasy, its popularity among young people could increase.

Illicit drug use in prisons continues to involve mainly cannabis and pharmaceuticals, although heroin and amphetamine use is also increasing. If 'ice' becomes more readily available in Australia and enters the prison system, the attendant behavioural problems could cause difficulties.

In future we will probably see further facilitation of laundering the proceeds of drug crime as a result of the rapidly evolving technologies in trade, finance and investment. This will include the use of non-banking financial institutions. The statistical recording systems maintained by Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies in Australia differ at present, and there is a need for standardisation of records relating to the forfeiture of assets and a reliable methodology for estimating the amount of drug money that is laundered.

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