

THE ANEX HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE 2004



Anex Conference Secretariat from left: Gladys Nixon, David Voon, Craig Shelley, Kitka Hiltula, Yael Cohn. Absent: Sandra Curro, Damien Lee



The Hon. Michael Wooldridge, Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS, Sexual Health and Hepatitis C delivers the opening address



LEFT: John Ryan with plenary speaker, Tony Trimmingham

BUSINESS ROLLS UP SLEEVES FOR HARM REDUCTION

Senior business identities from major health, environment, broadcasting and business chamber of commerce lent their support to harm reduction by volunteering at this year's Anex Conference. The list of business figures who volunteered to facilitate sessions included directors, general managers and chief executive officers of organisations including: the Environment Protection Authority, Royal Melbourne Hospital, SBS Melbourne, and the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Delegates and facilitators were provided with a conference program that has been applauded by participants as "stimulating, challenging, enjoyable", "far more worthwhile, informative and relevant than many conferences that cost far far more", and "really professional with up to date information and interesting speakers all the way through".

The Hon. Dr. Michael Wooldridge, Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS, Sexual Health and Hepatitis C (MACASHH) delivered the opening address to more than 250 delegates from across Australia. Referring specifically to Needle and Syringe Programs, Dr. Wooldridge declared: "This is one of the

most important health interventions we make in Australia." Though he cautioned delegates that Needle and Syringe Programs would need to offer a broad range of services if they are to enhance their popularity with the community.

People, Practice, Evidence

To coincide with the theme of this year's conference – People, Practice, Evidence – the opening plenary featured presentations from Tony Trimmingham and veteran drug user activist, David Herk. The two speakers related stories on the "true life" experiences of people who use drugs.

Trimingham (the founding member of Family Drug Support) recounted the moving story of his son's life and subsequent death due to drug overdose. Many delegates highlighted Trimmingham's presentation as one of the most significant presentations during the two days of the conference.

Following the plenary session, Professor Jake Najman of the Queensland Alcohol and Drugs Research and Education Centre (QADREC) explored the socio-structural changes that lead to illicit drug use and explored the knowledge base and injecting experiences of new injectors. He concluded with some practical guidelines for health care providers who work with people who inject drugs.

Colette McGrath from the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre explored how staff who work in low threshold services such as NSP keep motivated to care and keep trying, even when it seems that everyone else has given up. According to McGrath, exposure to clients who may be potentially doing harm to themselves or who may come close to death in the event of an overdose, can lead to "frustration and a feeling of helplessness in the face of problems that seem insoluble and even inevitable." Yet her session highlighted that there are also events that can inspire one to keep going. "When the client that you thought might actually be better off dead writes you a letter thanking you for caring and being the inspirational for them finally making a change."

Jackie Hallam from The Link Youth Health Services in Hobart reported on her experience in developing NSP service standards across Tasmania. The standards cover ten dimensions of NSP service including consumer engagement, educational information, referrals, facilities, equipment, information management and workforce development. According to Hallam, "developing NSP standards was akin to opening a 'Pandora's Box' as the process highlighted a wide range of

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further activities required for the program to achieve best practice."

The Anex Harm Reduction Conference 2004 was sponsored by the Victorian Department of Human Services, and the City of Melbourne. Other sponsors included QADREC, and the

South Australian Drugs and Alcohol Services Council (DASC). The sponsorships from these organisations enabled the attendance by NSP workers from Queensland and South Australia.

With delegates from a diverse range of backgrounds, the Conference proved to be an important networking opportunity for staff working in the harm reduction sector. As one delegate related, "I live in a remote location. This type of conference is invaluable to me in terms of exposure to the subject and other workers in the field."

Another delegate reported, "I was actually able to assist someone from the Northern Territory with support resources in their area, and I'm not even from there!"

Other delegates expressed appreciation at the opportunity to establish an understanding at a national level of NSP-related issues, and to gain a clearer understanding of how NSPs can and are

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4 DRUG TREATMENT REFERRAL PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES

What are the key issues that influence the practice and outcomes of referrals through NSP services? To answer this question, a recent study drew on a national overview of NSP, and conducted a detailed data and case study analysis of services in NSW and a comparative review of services in Queensland.

5 National NSP Meeting 2004

NSP staff from around Australia came together in Melbourne to discuss key issues impacting on the sector. The Meeting resulted in a series of recommendations for action.

6 Hospital-based NSP

When asked to resolve 22 written conscientious objections and make an NSP happen, Wayne's first thought was to throw the envelope under a bush and run for the hills. Six months later, the NSP that he and his team established is used as an example for other hospital-based NSP sites in WA. This is their story.

6 FROM "NEEDLE VAN" TO HEALTH CENTRE

During 2004, the mobile NSP located in Redfern, Sydney became caught in the cross-fire between police and Aboriginal groups in the aftermath of the 'Redfern Riot'. The NSW Premier, the Hon. Bob Carr, plans to build a \$1.5 million health centre in Redfern that will provide a range of services to injecting drug users - including the provision of sterile injecting equipment.