



350 tackle amphetamines at the Australasian amphetamine conference

The Australasian Amphetamines Conference saw more than 350 delegates representing the entire spectrum of the services and organizations grappling with the challenge of amphetamine use, get together to share their experiences and various perspectives to find practical solutions to address amphetamine-related issues.

Feedback from frontline workers across health, drug and alcohol, emergency medicine and law enforcement, and community members and families suggested that there was a perceived sharp rise in amphetamine use. Anex shared their concerns that this may become a significant issue for the community and convened the conference.

John Ryan, CEO of Anex, called for a 'practical and pragmatic approach to the amphetamine issue'. Eager to create an atmosphere of cooperation, he emphasized that 'we need a practical and effective response' and that 'governments need to supply realistic leadership'.

The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the federal Minister for Health and Ageing (the principal sponsor of the event) opened the conference and announced that from 2006-2007, the government has committed \$38.9 million over four years to target new trends in illicit drug use including Ice and Ecstasy.

'Drug abuse is one of the most critical health problems that we are facing today. It's about working together. The impacts on Australian society are becoming enormous,' he said.

Mr. Pyne outlined the federal government's future role as overseer of a multi-armed approach to amphetamine issues, but stressed a strong commitment to the law and order policies currently in effect. 'We will continue to work with the people on the frontline as well as government and non-government organizations.'

The Hon. John Hatzistergos, NSW Minister for Health, suggested that conferences such as the Australasian Amphetamine Conference

can have a direct impact on drug use. 'After the 1999 Drug Summit, the use of heroin has decreased,' he noted.

'The NSW Government is concerned about amphetamines as you are. We aim to tackle the problems involving the whole of the community,' he said.

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Professional problem-solver Jason Clarke summed up the issues:

'It's not a simple solution. We can't throw money at it. Or ideas at it. Can't rename it, or re-zone it, or just have a conference. We have to get to the bottom of the causes, and

there are probably more than one. It's not about the drug. It's about the culture.'

John Ryan, CEO of Anex, called upon delegates not to waste this new information, but to act upon it. He urged delegates to continue to build relationships and to take a role in educating the broader community.

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AMPHETAMINE: FEAR, FACT AND FANTASY

There is a popular saying in the media that 'if it bleeds, it leads'. It refers to society's and the media's preoccupation with news about tragedies, disasters, accidents, crime and other misfortunes. This plays out in editorial decisions in all areas of the media so that the first stories on the front page, leading the television and radio news are provocative, sometimes sensationalist and more than likely motivated by ratings, newspaper sales or competitive grabs for audiences.

According to the research paper 'Print Media Reporting on Drugs and Crime, 1995-1998' released by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2001, drug-related crime usually makes it into the news. The paper examined a sample of print-media reporting on drugs and crime over a four-year period and found that media reporting on drugs has been widely criticised due to limited and distorted representation dependent on a few easily accessible sources and because it presents a one-sided picture. The authors concluded that although the media may not change opinion, they do set the agenda.

The 'If it bleeds, it leads' session of the Australasian Amphetamine Conference spotlights the coverage of amphetamines and related issues in the media. Its task was to see how the media set the agenda and the parameters for discussion and debate within the community. There was also a focus on the issues of limited and distorted representation, dependence on a few easily accessible sources and the presentation of one-sided opinions. The forum

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METH: Madness and myth

The public discourse about methamphetamine often links its use with mental illness, in particular methamphetamine-induced psychosis. This issue loomed large in the minds of many delegates at the Australasian Amphetamine Conference who shared experiences, raised questions and challenged stereotypes often associated with people who use methamphetamine... p8

AMPHETAMINE: Impact and innovation at the frontline

Developing and delivering appropriate interventions for amphetamine users has been one of the recent challenges for frontline services such as Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs), police, ambulance paramedics and hospital emergency departments. How has the change in drug use patterns affected the work of frontline services? How are services responding to the increase in amphetamine-related presentations? p6

AMPHETAMINES IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BEYOND

With speakers from the United States, Asia and New Zealand, Australian delegates were offered a perspective on how the Amphetamine issue is being approached and dealt with in other countries, providing much needed insight into what in Australia is a problem that has real consequences... p2

TREATMENT: NO SINGLE SOLUTION

Currently across Australasia the main options for methamphetamine treatments are psychosocial interventions, detoxification and some pharmacotherapies. It is estimated that there are 102,600 regular users of methamphetamine in Australia and that 14,780 Australians received treatment during 2004 and 2005. While this is evidence that methamphetamine users are receiving the treatments that are available, Rebecca McKetin, from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, reports that 'Only a small proportion of people who are dependent on methamphetamine access treatment.' p10