

# 2 The National Drug Strategy

## Background

The NDS, formerly the NCADA, was initiated in 1985 following a Special Premiers' Conference. From its inception the Strategy recognised the importance of a comprehensive, integrated approach to the harmful use of licit and illicit drugs and other substances. The aim is to achieve a balance between demand-reduction and supply-reduction measures to minimise the harmful effects of drugs in Australian society.

## Evaluation of the National Drug Strategy 1993–1997

Professors Single and Rohl, authors of *The National Drug Strategy: Mapping the Future*, found that Australia's National Drug Strategy is widely recognised as one of the most progressive and respected drug strategies in the world. They considered that the success of Australia's drug policy was based on four main features:

- the principle of harm minimisation, which recognises the need to take a wide range of approaches in dealing with drug-related harm—for example, supply-reduction, demand-reduction (including abstinence-oriented interventions) and harm-reduction strategies;
- the comprehensiveness of the approach, encompassing the harmful use of licit drugs (such as tobacco, alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs), illicit drugs and other substances (such as inhalants and kava);
- the promotion of partnerships between health, law-enforcement and education agencies, community-based organisations and industry in tackling drug-related harm; and
- a balanced approach—between supply-reduction, demand-reduction and harm-reduction strategies; between preventing use and harm, facilitating access to treatment, and encouraging research; and between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.

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

The National Drug Strategic Framework 1998–99 to 2002–03 presents a shared vision, a framework for cooperation and a basis for coordinated action to reduce the harm caused by drugs in Australia.

The Framework maintains the policy principles of the previous phases of the NDS and adopts the major recommendations of *The National Drug Strategy: Mapping the Future*.

The Framework has been prepared under the direction of the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) which brings together the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for health and law enforcement to collectively determine national policies and programs designed to reduce the harm caused by drugs to individuals, families and communities in Australia.

The document reflects the decision of MCDS following the evaluation of the NDS 1993–97 that a nationally coordinated and integrated approach to reducing the harm arising from the use of licit and illicit drugs should continue for a further five years. This includes a commitment to reduce the supply of and demand for illicit drugs.

## **Performance indicators**

As part of the Single and Rohl (1997) evaluation, Williams (1997) measured progress against 52 key national indicators for the full NCADA/NDS period. The indicators had been adopted by the MCDS in 1993 as part of the National Drug Strategic Plan 1993–1997 (CDHHLGCS 1993). He concluded that ‘greater success was achieved in the areas of tobacco and alcohol, less for pharmaceuticals, and results were poor, relative to the success in other areas, for illicit drugs’.

The National Drug Strategic Framework 1998–99 to 2002–03 will be accompanied by a series of National Drug Action Plans to be developed during 1999 and 2000. These Plans 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.

## **Evaluation, monitoring and reporting**

Monitoring and evaluation strategies are required to determine whether the objectives and priorities of the National Drug Strategic Framework are being met and whether specific strategies identified in National Drug Action Plans are effective.

The framework includes provision for evaluation and monitoring to:

- measure the National Drug Strategic Framework’s performance against its objectives and priorities, using the best available medical, social and epidemiological data;
- provide timely and accurate information on the NDS program performance for program management and Commonwealth, State and Territory annual reporting purposes;
- identify emerging challenges and changing trends in harmful drug use, including the emergence of new drug-related harms; and
- communicate to all levels of government and the wider community the success, problems and challenges of the NDS.

It is anticipated this will be achieved through:

- review and refinement of performance indicators for regular monitoring of the effectiveness (including cost-effectiveness) of the National Drug Strategic Framework and the National Drug Action Plans in meeting its objectives;
- coordination of existing data sources and early development of appropriate databases and information systems to allow for monitoring against agreed performance indicators;
- a requirement that Commonwealth, State and Territory governments agree on a reporting framework for implementation of the NDS within their jurisdictions; and
- an annual monitoring report to the MCDS dealing with implementation of the National Drug Strategic Framework (MCDS 1998).