



Anex 2010

AUSTRALIAN DRUGS CONFERENCE

Public Health and Harm Reduction

MEDIA RELEASE

Prescription injecting a problem in rural Australia

The extent of the availability of illicit drugs in rural and regional areas is not fully appreciated, according to John Ryan, convenor of the Anex 2010 Australian Drugs Conference being held at the MCG on October 25-26.

Mr Ryan, CEO of Anex, a not-for-profit health organisation that supports health solutions for alcohol and illicit drug use, said although heroin use is less visible in regional and rural areas than in the cities, rural Australia is not immune from increases in the injection of prescription drugs.

“Drug use continues to cause harm in the Australian community.”

“Many drug users are ingesting and injecting opiates found in prescription drugs rather than heroin which is less available in regional areas. There is a real problem with doctor shopping and illicit use of pharmaceuticals,” he said.

He urged government as part of its regional initiatives to increase drug services and research in these areas where residents “are often already coping with a lack of health and welfare services.”

One of the speakers, Ms Loretta Baker, a community nurse in Maitland, said many drug users in regional areas live in caravans after having been homeless. “Many have spent time in prison, juvenile institutions or mental health facilities and are too ill or otherwise unable to secure a job and housing,” she said.

Ms Baker, started the Coachstop Caravan Park Outreach Project 10 years ago to work with government, charities and business to develop health services at the caravan park, the prime provider of housing for at risk families and individuals in the Maitland area.

The outreach project has established a needle-syringe program, drug and alcohol services, a volunteer GP, paediatric clinics, literacy programs and food programs. “It has benefited hundreds of residents by providing low cost health care and welfare services to disadvantaged residents many of whom have returned to permanent housing, education and the workforce. It has provided hope and opportunity where previously very little existed,” she said.

Ms Baker said there was a need for funding for similar programs throughout isolated areas.

The Australian Drug Conference is the only event of this kind that includes lead researchers, senior health bureaucrats, community health managers, as well as front-line workers and users.

You can find more information about the conference by visiting:

www.australiandrugconference.org.au

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