

Tuesday, 15 April 2008

Moreland Hall joins other agencies in calling for action on alcohol-related violence

Major alcohol and other drug (AOD) agency UnitingCare Moreland Hall has united with more than 25 other organisations to call for greater Government action on alcohol-related violence.

Moreland Hall Chief Executive Officer Laurence Alvis said that while the Federal Government's recent commitment to set up a task force looking at alcohol issues (as well as obesity and tobacco use) was positive, more needed to be done.

"The Government themselves have started to recognise the extent of the problem. Health Minister Nicola Roxon recently just released a report saying the social cost of alcohol was over \$15bn in Australia," Laurence Alvis said. "We now need to ensure concrete actions are taken to tackle this problem."

It is for this reason that Moreland Hall has joined the National Alliance Against Alcohol Related Violence, which was launched nationally earlier today. The Alliance, set up by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, includes many other organisations in the AOD field, including the Australia National Council on Drugs, the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, the Australian Drug Foundation, Salvation Army and the Mental Health Council of Australia.

"Every weekend we turn on the news of someone being assaulted or losing their life because of rage fuelled by alcohol. What we don't hear is the countless number of family members who are threatened behind closed doors as a result of alcohol related rage," Laurence Alvis said.

"The research evidence for the relationship between alcohol and physical aggression is strong, consistent and wide-ranging. Research evidence estimates that about 47% of perpetrators of violence and 43% of victims of violence were intoxicated or had consumed alcohol prior to the incident."

He said Moreland Hall worked with clients every day who dealt with the effects of alcohol-related violence.

"At Moreland Hall our evidence is the same. Alcohol is the single most destructive drug in terms of the numbers of clients we see. For example, of the 1600 clients the organisation saw in 2006/2007, nearly 40 per cent were for alcohol (approximately 640 clients). This is the single biggest amount for any individual drug, and a percentage that has steadily increased in the last five years. Excessive use of alcohol has many detrimental effects within our society, including family violence, aggression and drink-driving just to name a few."

"Recently released research also shows over 80% of Australians are concerned about alcohol-related violence, with at least one in five Australians having been affected by such violence, and 80% of people believing it is on the increase" he said. "Now is the time for urgent action from Governments."

Laurence Alvis supported a range of different actions outlined by the Alliance that Governments, both State and Federal, could undertake to stem the growing tide of alcohol-related violence.

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"While we welcome the consideration of issues such as putting warning labels on alcohol products and restricting advertising, we believe the Government needs to go further," he said. "It's clear that Governments need to look at reducing and restricting the physical availability of alcohol from current levels."

Some of the actions recommended by the Alliance that Moreland Hall supports:

- The Federal Government need to review the current tax system relating to alcohol, particularly to encourage manufacturers to focus on low-alcohol products;
- Alcohol should be made exempt from the National Competition Policy, which has led to a big increase in outlets;
- Governments need to review extended trading hours of licensed premises and liquor outlets;
- Governments also need to look at and reduce the number of outlets;

Laurence Alvis said it was important that Government recognised the extent of the problem, and while the development of the taskforce was an important step, it was only a first step.

"This is a problem that costs the community \$15 billion in related costs. Governments receive billions of dollars in taxes from alcohol each year, but have only put around \$30 million into prevention each year. The \$53 million recently announced for programs targeting youth binge drinking and sports clubs is important, but much more can and needs to be done," he said.

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For further comment, contact Moreland Hall Chief Executive Officer Laurence Alvis on 9384 8880.

Background about Moreland Hall

UnitingCare Moreland Hall is an Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) treatment and education agency of the Uniting Church in Australia. Moreland Hall has been operating since 1970 and provides a range of treatment and education services to clients in the North West Metropolitan region of Melbourne. These include counselling and support in the community and at Port Phillip prison, adult and youth home-based and residential withdrawal, education and training, drug diversion programs, supported accommodation and youth and family services.

About the National Alliance Against Alcohol Related Violence: The following organisations are part of the alliance: Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD); Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia; Australian Drug Foundation; NDRI (National Drug Research Institute); NDARC (National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre); Community Alcohol Action Network (CAAN); Odyssey House McGrath Foundation; Turning Point; The Salvation Army; The Mental Health Council of Australia; The Nossal Institute of Global Health; We Help Ourselves; Ted Noffs Foundation; Australasian Therapeutic Communities Association; Randwick Council; Alcohol and Drug Foundation - Queensland (ADFQ); The Alcohol, Tobacco and Other drugs Council of Australia – ATODC; ADFACT (Alcohol and Drug Foundation ACT inc); Peoples Alcohol Action Coalition; Serenity Lodge; Network of Alcohol and Drugs Agencies (NADA); CAAPS (Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services inc); WANADA; Cyrenian House; ADAC (Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council of SA); St Vincents Hospital Emergency Medicine Department, Melbourne; Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS); VAADA; DRUG ARM (Drug Awareness and Relief Foundation (Australia)) and UnitingCare Moreland Hall.

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