

Thursday, 13 March 2008

Commonwealth Government announcement to help battle binge drinking and alcohol abuse is applauded

Major Victorian Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) agency **UnitingCare Moreland Hall** (Moreland Hall) has applauded the decision by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to make youth binge drinking a major priority area by devoting \$53 million to tackle the problem.

Moreland Hall Chief Executive Officer Laurence Alvis said that binge drinking and alcohol misuse generally was a major problem in society. He reiterated that alcohol was the second-most dangerous drug in terms of chronic disease and early deaths after tobacco, and was the single most destructive drug in terms of the numbers of clients the agency saw.

"It's great that the Commonwealth are now recognising the problem and doing something about it," Laurence Alvis said. He said Moreland Hall was particularly encouraged by the Government's focus on early intervention programs, funded to the tune of \$19.1 million.

"We are currently developing a brief intervention program for young people who want to better manage their alcohol use," Laurence Alvis said. The program involves education and information sessions looking at the risks and harms associated with alcohol use, helping them assess their own drinking levels, and assisting them with strategies to help reduce those risks and harms.

"The people we are targeting with this program are those who think to themselves 'I'm not an alcoholic' but they may be concerned about their alcohol use, and want to do something about it," he said. "These people would not normally think of accessing AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or a drug treatment program and so their needs have not been met by any services."

The program will be open to both young adults who identify themselves as drinking to a hazardous level or those who are concerned about a family member's binge drinking. Those who need further assistance beyond the program can be referred to other support services at Moreland Hall.

Laurence Alvis said this project had been developed by the agency with out any Government support, as previously there had not been funding for alcohol education or services by the agency.

"We think it's great that they're recognising there is a need here," he said, saying that the agency would look for further support for developing programs such as the one above.

Laurence Alvis also welcomed the \$20 million media campaign to make young adults aware of binge drinking hazard, although he suggested the campaign will need to be targeted properly to have maximum effect, rather than relying only on scare tactics.

"We know that young people respond to the same message in different ways, depending on whether they are someone who controls or minimises risks, or are for example a thrill seeker," he said. "So in order to be effective,

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it will need to have a number of messages, and be delivered across a number of youth-appropriate formats: not only television and radio but also online and using new technologies like SMS.”

“We also need to be careful to not just scapegoat young people in the process” Laurence Alvis said. “We’re talking about problems that are faults within the general culture; young people are not the only ones who binge drink.”

He said Moreland Hall would also be developing further resources such as booklets and information materials addressing ways to help people looking to change their drinking habits, and that would be available by mid year.

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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.

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