

### **Diving into Drug Action Week**

In the lead up to Drug Action Week (18-22 June 2007) two novice skydivers jumped from the skies of Canberra (17 June) to let the community know there is help available for people with alcohol and other drug problems and to raise awareness about the links between substance use and mental illness.

Jumping with her son Aaron Blatch, Lynne Magor-Blatch, Clinical Director Client Services with the Alcohol and Drug Foundation ACT (ADFACT) said it was important that Canberra residents know there is help available for people with substance use and mental health problems.

"If you think you have a problem knowing where to get help and the different types of treatments available is very important.

"General Practice is a great first port of call. GPs are well trained to treat patients and if necessary refer them to other allied health professionals, such as mental health nurses or to specialist alcohol and other drug services such as ADFACT", Ms Magor-Blatch said.

Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said as many as one person in every four with a substance use problem will also have a mental health problem.

"Identifying these links as early as possible is essential to ensure timely intervention before the problems spiral out of control.

"There are misconceptions about substance use and mental health problems. It's not just the patients who are injecting illicit drugs or doctor shopping for benzodiazepines who need treatment.

"More often than not it is the patients who visit their GP for general health concerns. They may have depression or anxiety and could be consuming large amounts of alcohol or taking recreational drugs," Dr Hobbs said.

As GPs are able to help patients before they arrive at the accident and emergency wards of hospitals, up-to-date training for professionals is essential. In conjunction with the Department of Health and Ageing and Department of Veterans Affairs, AGPN has developed the 'Can Do Initiative'. The program allows GPs and their peers to access education and training that will enhance their existing skills in identifying, treating and supporting patients with coexisting mental health and substance use problems.

"The training explains street jargon and the types of behaviour and symptoms health professionals need to be aware of. It is an excellent resource for the profession and certainly helps patient outcomes," Dr Hobbs said.

Lynne Magor-Blatch said, "Substance users take risks with their lives every day. Today we have taken a risk, but we have taken it in a supported and controlled way. If my jumping from a plane in the middle of a Canberra winter helps one local family access help for a substance use problem it will be well worth it".

For more details on Drug Action Week please visit [www.drugactionweek.org.au](http://www.drugactionweek.org.au)

**For more information please call Kathryn Conroy, AGPN's Media Liaison Officer on 0416 428 678**