



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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Fighting drug and alcohol misuse at the frontline: Call for more GP support

ADGP says it supports the Commonwealth Government’s multi-dimensional approach to fighting drug and alcohol misuse, but has called for more initiatives to assist GPs in identifying and treating at-risk patients.

ADGP Chair Dr Rob Walters said GPs regularly saw patients suffering the effects and complications of harmful drinking. “The flipside of this is that GPs are in an ideal position to play a key role in the fight alcohol abuse. They can identify individuals at risk of serious alcohol problems and intervene early. And they can promote awareness in all patients about the health benefits of sensible drinking.”

“But GPs must be supported in this role. ADGP would like to see more initiatives designed to assist GPs combating the scourge of drug and alcohol misuse, such as GP education schemes, allied health support, and incentives for GPs to conduct more screening and treatment of alcohol-related problems.”

Kate Carnell, ADGP CEO, said Drug Action Week had done well to draw public attention to the huge impact of drug and alcohol misuse on the health of Australian communities. “This week has highlighted important issues and raised awareness about the excessive harm that results from unhealthy drug and alcohol use.

“It is clear that drug and alcohol-related health problems are prevalent in Australia. Findings from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, released earlier this year, showed that risky consumption of alcohol was on the increase. This trend is of real concern, because alcohol abuse is a major risk factor for both physical and mental illness,” Ms Carnell said.

“An issue of particular concern is the increasing number of 12 to 15-years-olds who are drinking. This behaviour can be detrimental to youth development and may result in chronic health problems later in life.”

“There has been much important work done in recent years to address these problems. ADGP is encouraged by the Government’s planned National Alcohol Strategy for 2005-2009, which presents an opportunity for government to work with the health sector, industry and community partners to decrease alcohol misuse and its associated health problems.

Ms Carnell said programs like *Managing the Mix*, a national ADGP-coordinated initiative which helps GPs treat people with coexisting alcohol misuse and mental health problems, was an example of the kind of policy-driven programs that greatly enhanced primary care, and in doing so lifted the burden from other areas of the health system. “Other national preventive programs implemented through the Divisions Network, such as *Lifestyle Scripts* and *MindMatters Plus GP*, are also examples of general practice initiatives designed to promote healthy habits and prevent behaviour that can lead to drinking problems.”

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WHAT IS ADGP?

- ADGP is the peak body representing 119 Divisions of General Practice and eight state-based organisations (SBOs) around Australia. The Divisions Network supports general practice and their practice teams and drives the implementation of innovative health strategies.
- ADGP, through the Divisions Network, works to integrate general practice with other sectors of the health system, both government and non-government, to deliver high quality care to the Australian community.
- ADGP is committed to promoting the health of all Australians by supporting the role of Divisions in the nation’s primary health care system.

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