

NewsPoint

March 2008



Turning Point
Alcohol & Drug Centre

**HERE TO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE**

A newsletter produced by Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre to highlight issues relating to alcohol and drug treatment and the activities and concerns of the organisation.

Turning Point strives to promote and maximise the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities living with and affected by alcohol and other drug-related harms.



P2 [TURNING POINT PUBLICATIONS](#)

P2 [NEWS IN BRIEF](#)

P3 [BUILDING AN AOD WORK
FORCE IN SOUTH EAST ASIA](#)

P3 [TREATING DRUG USERS](#)

P4 [POST WITHDRAWAL GROUP](#)

P4 [ECSTASY, KETAMINE AND GHB](#)

ISSN 1834-5697 (Print)
ISSN 1834-5697 (Online)

Spotlight on alcohol

Changing binge drinking culture in Australia

Turning Point Deputy Director, Trevor King, comments on the growing focus on alcohol-related harm in Australia.

Early in 2005 I sensed a growing momentum to tackle Australia's drinking culture. We were energised by the ADF conference, *'Thinking Drinking: Achieving Cultural Change by 2020'* where experts grappled to understand why harmful drinking was so much a part of daily life in Australia and how accepting we were of the associated health, social and economic costs. During that year I was involved in the development of Australia's new *National Alcohol Strategy: Towards Safer Drinking Cultures 2006–2009*. The Strategy outlined many ways that we could reduce alcohol-related harm. In 2006 the Victorian Parliament released a report on harmful drinking and also outlined a range of strategies for dealing with it. All the messages were clear – Australia has an enormous binge drinking problem that one way or another impacts on all of our daily lives. The overall community cost is now conservatively estimated to be over \$15 billion annually. There is also a growing body of research literature that can inform our approaches to this major public health issue.

Unfortunately an understanding of the nature and magnitude of a problem and having evidence-based strategies for dealing with it are seldom sufficient as policy-change drivers. A consistent call for alcohol policy change and strategies to achieve change have been largely ignored to date. There are some very powerful interest groups committed to the status quo.

The lack of action can be discouraging for those of us who have been dealing with the individual, family and community costs of alcohol for many years. However I remain hopeful. I was around in 1985 when the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse was launched. This was not as a result of a rational policy process, but rather driven by a coming together of factors that provided fertile ground for change. It was a mix of electioneering, politicians personally



touched by drugs, other politicians with vision, fear of HIV and other factors.

I now sense a similar groundswell in relation to addressing the unacceptable drinking culture in this country. Where once we defined alcohol-related harms as the number of cirrhotic livers we now talk about amenity issues, assault, fear of abuse or assault, injuries, absenteeism, presenteeism, etc. The media is now more engaged and the quality of reporting is generally of a high standard. There is some evidence that governments are responding. As I write this, the Queensland Government is proposing to introduce a levy on late-night venues to fund strategies to curb binge drinking. Similar strategies may follow in other jurisdictions. New or refreshed governments around the country may take up the challenge. I'm pleased that Turning Point in collaboration with others is involved in research and providing policy advice designed to support the introduction of measures that will have real impact.

Turning Point publications



Clinical Treatment Guidelines for Alcohol and Drug Clinicians

The *Clinical Treatment Guidelines for Alcohol and Drug Clinicians* series has been developed as a reliable and practical resource in the treatment of people with alcohol and other drug problems. The series combines the experience and knowledge of Turning Point clinicians and researchers with the latest information from the wider field.

Each publication provides user-friendly tools and 'best practice' guidelines for the application of clinical skills in day-to-day client care. Each title includes an overview of the treatment context, principles of application and practice guidelines.

Victorian Alcohol Statistics

The *Victorian Alcohol Statistics Handbook* series presents some of the major findings regarding alcohol-related harm in Victoria. They are a valuable resource for government at all levels, the alcohol and drug sector, and the health field in Victoria, informing policy formulation, resource allocation, service planning and monitoring.

Additional publications continue to be added to the series, each focusing on an important aspect of alcohol and alcohol-related harm.

Getting Through Withdrawal

Self-help booklets that provide practical information and advice for people who are thinking about, or going through, drug withdrawal.

Summaries and ordering information for all of our publications are available at: www.turningpoint.org.au/library/lib.html

News in brief

Farewell to Professor Nick Crofts after almost three years as Director of Turning Point. Nick brought a charismatic leadership style, enthusiasm and a genuine commitment to making a difference for our client group. He also opened the door for Turning Point to take a greater part in addressing alcohol and drug-related harms in neighbouring countries. Turning Point would like to wish Nick every success in the next phase of his career.

Welcome back Dr Lynda Berends who has taken up the position of Senior Research Fellow in our Health Services Research team. Lynda was formerly the head of the Health Services Research and Evaluation program at Turning Point (2000–05) and her recent role at La Trobe University included research in the areas of primary health and criminal justice.

Another important study launched recently by the AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research is an Australia-wide examination of the harms caused by alcohol misuse to third parties. Believed to be the first of its kind, the research is being funded by the AER Foundation and conducted by Professor Robin Room, who is based at Turning Point. While there have been many studies conducted into the harm caused to others by second hand tobacco smoke and gambling addictions, there has been no similar, comprehensive analysis of 'second hand' alcohol harms experienced by those in contact with problem drinkers.

For more information about this project, contact Anne-Marie Laslett at the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research on 03 8413 8413.

The establishment of a Practice Research Network in Victoria is an exciting new initiative which aims to develop a stronger working partnership between researchers and clinicians. The project is funded by the AER Foundation and offers a series of workshops which will allow clinicians to have input into research processes and increase their knowledge of AOD research and its translation into practice. This initiative also includes the production of *Research Link*, a research bulletin that will be available in hard copy or can be downloaded from the Turning Point website.

Workshops commence mid 2008. For further information regarding the workshops, please contact the project coordinator, Lisa Johns: lisa.johns@turningpoint.org.au

Training on how to manage difficult behaviour is run quarterly for Turning Point clinical services staff. Clients with complex issues such as dual diagnosis and acquired brain injury can pose challenges for staff. The training involves a theory session on how to recognise behaviour and triggers and a practical session with role playing and case studies on de-escalating violent and psychotic episodes. Training is open to workers in the AOD sector. Please contact Clinical Services on 03 8413 8413 for more information.

Drug FX is an interactive and informative website developed by Turning Point with funding from the City of Melbourne. Targetted at a young audience, this new site contains information, activities and quizzes about the most commonly used illicit drugs and their effects. With plenty of educational and learning tools, as well as links to support and help for young people, Drug FX should be a popular resource for schools. Check out the website here: www.drugpoint.org.au



Building an AOD workforce in South East Asia

Thai doctor visits Turning Point as part of AusAID project



Dr Surninporn, a lecturer in psychiatry at Chiang Mai University

Dr Surninporn, a lecturer in psychiatry at Chiang Mai University Thailand, will be joining Turning Point's Education and Training Services for the next two months to work on two AusAID funded projects which focus on the illicit drugs trade in Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Dr Surninporn will work with Wendy Dodd on a project that involves building and sustaining an AOD

workforce in South East Asia, and with Joanne Hayter on increasing the quality and penetration of substitution therapy for opioid dependence treatment.

Outputs for these projects include regional training needs assessments based on organisational and individual needs in each country; accredited course curriculum and content for Chiang Mai University; the establishment of a centre of excellence in drug treatment education at the university with staff trained and supported to deliver courses; and planning, designing, and implementing effective service delivery programs and data systems for a range of regional stakeholders.

Dr Surinporn is a Member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists of Thailand, as well as a member of both the Psychiatric Association and Medical Council of Thailand. She is also one of the team members at Northern Substance Abuse Centre (NSAC), and has published several papers on alcohol withdrawal and mental health.

Dr Surinporn will be spending her time predominantly at Education and Training, however will also visit different areas of Turning Point to learn about the organisation and its operations.

Treating drug users More doctors urgently needed

It is estimated that there is around 35,000 Victorians who use opioids in a problematic way, with just over 11,000 users receiving pharmacotherapies such as methadone and buprenorphine. Treatment for opioid dependency is managed by GPs in their normal practice settings, however a staggeringly low number of Victorian GPs (only 5%) are actively prescribing pharmacotherapies to their patients.

There is evidence to support the use of pharmacotherapies in preventing a user's relapse to heroin, as well as reducing the risk of overdose, promoting better health and social functioning and a reduction in cost to the community, such as heroin-related crime.

So why are GPs reluctant to get involved? Time constraints, complex patients, feeling unsupported, and not being aware of training, education and support services are some of the reasons GPs have given for not wanting to prescribe.

However, as the demand for pharmacotherapies increases and the prescribers who are currently active approach retirement and are not replaced, there is a real and urgent need for more GPs to treat drug dependent clients.

A combination of professional training and support provided by Turning Point, Southern Health and Western Health can change any preconceptions about prescribing and give doctors who have the time, patience and basic skills to become a prescriber, a boost in confidence and a greater appreciation of the complexity of client needs.

Dr Geoff Richards, a GP in a Melbourne-based private practice, has been prescribing methadone and other pharmacotherapies for ten years. "I find it very rewarding," he says, "GPs not providing substitute pharmacotherapies don't appreciate

how much variety there is in the drug and alcohol field. One aspect I particularly enjoy is treating a younger age group of people."

Dr Richards also believes that it is crucial for GPs to receive adequate training in order to feel confident in their role of prescribing pharmacotherapies. "I spent an enjoyable and informative session with a trainer, and completed a minimal amount of paperwork for DHS. I was also given manuals, reading material and information about supports," he says.

An important support service for doctors is DACAS, a twenty four hour telephone service which provides health professionals with advice on the clinical management of drug and alcohol issues. "When I first started prescribing, I felt well supported by phoning DACAS frequently," says Dr Richards.

Now, with ten years experience in substitute pharmacotherapies, Dr Richards has seen the benefits of a range of different treatment options for his patients.

"Methadone is a well known drug," he says, "But perhaps of greater benefit to my patients has been the newer agents, buprenorphine and suboxone. I believe they are safer, faster acting, easier to initiate than methadone, and easier to manage in terms of side effects."

The GP Pharmacotherapies Prescriber Project is currently seeking to recruit, train and support doctors into a prescribing role. More information about the pharmacotherapy prescriber training sessions is available on the Turning Point website: www.turningpoint.org.au, or contact Kieran Connolly (tel:03 8413 8704, email: kieranc@turningpoint.org.au).



General Practitioner
Pharmacotherapy Training Program
for Opioid Dependence

Post withdrawal group

We all know that relapse is a common part of the recovery process. But for many people who have started to use drugs or drink again after a period of abstinence, feelings of embarrassment, shame and failure can cause them to slip back into the familiar mindset of "I may as well just keep using".

That's where the post withdrawal group has been successful in supporting people who have recently withdrawn from or made changes to their drug of choice. Running for over a year now, the program is facilitated by trained alcohol and drug clinicians and is aimed at reducing the risk of relapse by providing people with valuable short-term support and education.

The group is designed to operate over a four-week period, with a different topic covered each week. People who might be waiting to get into counselling or residential rehab or wanting to reduce their pharmacotherapy intake are given a chance to share their experiences and concerns about alcohol and drug use with a group and explore ways in which they can manage their own withdrawal.

Participants may join the group at any time during the 4 week program, however, in order to make the most of the service, it is recommended that people attend the program for the full 4 weeks.

For more information about the Post Withdrawal Group, contact Clinical Services on 03 8413 8413.

Ecstasy, ketamine and GHB Review of treatment options

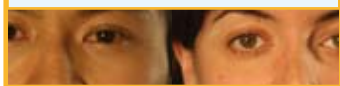
Turning Point has recently completed a study on *Ecstasy, ketamine and GHB: A review of users and Victorian alcohol and other drug treatment interventions*. This project, commissioned by DHS, provides a first step in better understanding ecstasy, ketamine and GHB (EKG) users, and their needs. AOD service providers, GPs and EKG users were interviewed. Service monitoring data and existing literature were also reviewed.

This preliminary study found that contact with AOD services generally occurred via drug diversion. According to EKG users, their use was rarely problematic, and they typically sought treatment in relation to other problematic drug use. Barriers to treatment access included a lack of EKG user confidence in treatment providers and previous negative treatment experiences. Service providers reported that infrequent contact with clients presenting with EKG concerns limited the development of practice wisdom. In addition, the lack of clinical evidence reduced their capacity to provide information on the long term effects of using these drugs.

For further information regarding this project, please contact, Janette Mugavin on 8413 8413.

Counselling online
www.counsellingonline.org.au

Anyone can end up
having a problem
with alcohol or drugs



24 hours 7 days a week FREE
counselling on the internet when
you visit counsellingonline.org.au

Or pick up the phone and call
DirectLine on **1800 888 236**



Turning Point
Alcohol & Drug Centre
[HERE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE](http://www.turningpoint.org.au)

Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre Inc.
ABN: 17 302 055 629
Registered Association no: A0029308B

54-62 Gertrude Street
Fitzroy Victoria 3065
T: 03 8413 8413
F: 03 9416 3420
E: info@turningpoint.org.au
W: www.turningpoint.org.au

Support Turning Point

JOIN THE MAILING LIST OR UPDATE YOUR DETAILS

- I would like to be included on the Turning Point mailing list to receive information about initiatives and events.
 I would like my details to be updated.

Name _____

Position/Organisation _____

Email _____

Tel _____

Address _____

Suburb _____

State _____

Postcode _____

MAKE A DONATION

I enclose a cheque or money order made payable to Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, being my donation of:

\$20 \$50 \$100 \$200 Other amount _____

(Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible)

OR please debit my Bankcard Mastercard Visa

Card Number

Expiry Date: _____

/

Signature _____

Please send information on bequests