National Drug Research Institute
Overview

• History
• Part of Faculty of Health Sciences at Curtin and one of 6 Tier 1 institutes
• WHO Collaborating Centre
• Relevance of NDRI to national strategy and beyond
  – Key result areas:
    • Conduct high quality research that will contribute to primary prevention of harmful drug use and reduction of drug related harm
    • Disseminate research findings to policy makers, practitioners, public health professionals, other researchers, community interest groups and the public; and contribute to the building of national capacity for research in the prevention of drug related harm
• Links to a range of stakeholders (e.g. health; police; drug consumers; community)
Range of key research areas

• Alcohol Policy
• Indigenous Australians
• Offender Health
• Primary Prevention and early intervention
• Social contexts of drug use
• People who continue to use alcohol and other drugs
• Tobacco
• New technologies
Contributions to expert panels and inquiries

- ADF
- NAGATSIHID – National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data
- ANCD
- DA-CCP
- NIDAAC
- NCPIC
- NHMRC –
  - Assessors; Review Panel members; Alcohol Guidelines
- Preventive Health Task Force
- Capital City Lord Mayors
• Rely on core funding from DoHA
• University support
• Income from competitive research and consultancies
NDRI External and Core Funding July 2004 - June 2010

- Core Funding - AGDHA
- 1.10a Competitive tendering for relevant commissioned research
- 1.9d Other state-based and industry competitive funding sources
- 1.9c Invited submissions
- 1.9a National peer reviewed competitive funding sources.
Diverse activities and outcomes demand diverse skills

• Varied professional background
  – Psychology
  – Public Health
  – Epidemiology
  – Anthropology
  – Medicine
  – Geography
  – Sociology
• Links with diverse partners, local, national and international
• Interested in research and activity that has a direct policy and community relevance and impact
The weakness of research in influencing policy

…. direct contribution to public policy is generally not viewed highly by most academics or the universities in which they work ..
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Research findings deserve more than A* ratings. They need to influence the making of public policy

Peter Shergold Australian, 4 May 2011
Contribute to evidence informed policy

• BUT
  – Research and policy, like oil and water, don’t always mix
    • Research is about evidence, fidelity and logical argument
    • Politics about perceptions, bargains and timing

• AND
  – Researchers are not necessarily skilled in influencing policy:
Evidence-based policy is a challenge

• In general there is disappointment at how research has influenced policy

“… many researchers are politically naïve. They have a poor understanding of how policy is made & have unrealistic expectations about what research can achieve.” Black 2001

“There has been disappointment at the lack of progress in promoting evidence-based policy & management compared with the relative success of evidence-based medicine … the consumers of policy & management research have not found the outputs sufficiently relevant & useful, & researchers have become frustrated by the lack of uptake of the results of such systematic reviews by policy makers & managers.” Sheldon 2005
Importance of community perceptions

- How community perceives issue(s) matters
  - e.g. models of drug use/dependence
  - Marginalisation vs humanisation of consumers

- May tolerate impersonal distal outcomes of drug use, but less willing to tolerate more immediate outcomes that have personal relevance

- If we wish to engage communities:
  - How drug use has personal relevance
  - There are cost-efficient interventions that have personal and community wide benefits
  - It is possible to act and things will improve
Be aware of how to create and take advantage of policy opportunity

• Policies that are likely to be embraced are:
  – Possible (technically feasible)
  – Politically attractive
  – Feasible within budgetary and other (practical) constraints
  – Congruent with community values and acceptable
• Researchers have an important role in policy development
• There are distinct skills and risks
• Requires ability to:
  – Develop evidence
  – Identify relevance for community and policy
  – Understand process and create partnerships
  – Understand and manage risks
  – Look for opportunities and be prepared
  – Persist
• We need to consider how we can better align the policy and research streams
  – Develop our skills in the art and science of policy change
  – Create collaborative networks (beyond the boundaries of AOD) to better communicate our outputs and inform policy
  – Ensure the community relevance of our interventions
  – Address challenges such as the marginalisation of people affected by drug use
  – Avoid the seduction of masterstrokes
  – Perhaps invest in some specific policy-research activity
  – Develop policy-practice relevant academic indicators
What are the lessons for research institutes such as NDRI?

• Accumulate and disseminate evidence
• Identify how to make it relevant
  – identify the problem and ensure the research outcome can be perceived as a viable solution that is relevant to the policy makers and community
• Look for emerging windows of opportunity that occur in the problem and political spheres
• Better understand the policy process and create partnerships
• Work more closely with policy process
Ethnographic research
and our Melbourne office
Ethnographic Research Program: July 2003 – present

- **Topics**: ATS, alcohol, IDU, services & HCV infection
- **Research sites**: Melbourne/regional Victoria, Sydney, Perth & Vancouver
- **Research staff**: 3 Research Fellows & casual RAs as required
- **PhD students**: 5 recently completed or under examination, 2 under direct supervision & 3 new students to start in 2011-12
- **Funding**: $3 million in competitive grants/tenders (NHMRC, ARC, AERF)
Ethnographic Research Program: July 2003 – present

- **Research collaborators:**
  - National centres at ANU & UNSW, Monash, Burnet Institute & Turning Point
  - Research centres in UK & Canada

- **Dissemination:**
  - 55 journal articles, book chapters, reports & community publications
  - 64 local and international conference, seminar & workshop presentations
  - 10 media reports

- **Peer recognition:**
  - Editor, *Contemporary Drug Problems*
  - Associate Editor, *International Journal of Drug Policy*
  - 2005 New Independent Researcher Infrastructure Support Award
  - 2007 Curtin Vice Chancellor’s Excel Award
  - Finalist, 2007 National Drug & Alcohol Awards, Excellence in Research
Projects Using Agent-Based Modelling to Explore Drug Policy Options

- ATS use & related harm among young Australians in Sydney, Perth & Melbourne

- Understanding the barriers to improved access, engagement and retention of methamphetamine users in health services in two areas of Melbourne

- Developing the capacity to model the impact of interventions that target high-risk drinking among young Australians

- Understanding and reducing alcohol-related harm among young adults in urban settings