

Speech for Hon Mark Butler MP  
Parliamentary Secretary for Health,  
Launch of Drug Action Week, Campbell High School  
15 June 2010

1700 words (approx) – 14 mins

**Acknowledgements**

Thank you David (Templeman) Good morning ladies and gentlemen

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.

I would like to start by offering the best wishes of the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, who unfortunately couldn't be with us today to officially launch Drug Action Week 2010 and asked that I represent her at this most important event.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Health, I am pleased to be here today to offer my support to what is a significant national community campaign.

**Drug Action Week**

Drug Action Week continues to go from strength to strength. This fantastic growth can be seen in the number of Drug Action Week events quadrupling in three years from 150 in 2007 to over 650 registrations for the 2010 campaign.

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) is to be commended on the growth of Drug Action Week and on the number of strategic partnerships Drug Action Week has developed. The past three years have seen organisations like Canberra Milk, the Rural Health and Education Foundation, Impaja Television, and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia partner with Drug Action Week.

These partnerships have significantly increased the number of people that are exposed to the Drug Action Week messages of: "alcohol is a drug, too!" and "looking after your mind!".

Alongside the strategic partnerships, ADCA's successful Drug Action Week media campaign last year resulted in over two million Australians being exposed to the "alcohol is a drug, too!" message.

ADCA has advised me that Drug Action Week will involve a host of activities across all states and territories. I'd like to break down the numbers to give you an idea of the scope. New South Wales leads the way with 150 activities, Queensland has registered 127, Victoria 92, South Australia 89, Western Australia 54, the Northern Territory 21 the ACT 49 and Tasmania 30.

We need cooperative grassroots initiatives like Drug Action Week – which involve all sectors working together - to make healthier communities.

I fully support the initiatives put forward as part of Drug Action Week and believe the activities registered this year will help to foster community debate and continue the process of long term change in alcohol and other drugs issues.

We also acknowledge those people who work in the frontline prevention and treatment services. This work is vital, and we need to offer our support to these very dedicated people who make a difference to people who are struggling with issues of addiction.

Noting the significant success of the Drug Action Week campaign, I am proud to represent the Australian Government, which in December 2009 committed multi-year funding of \$468,000 for Drug Action Week from 2010 to 2012.

## **Alcohol**

One of the themes for this year's Drug Action Week, which has carried over from 2009, is 'Alcohol is a Drug Too'.

Alcohol causes around 3000 deaths and 65 000 hospitalisations every year. In 2004-05, the annual cost to the Australian community of alcohol-related social problems was estimated at \$15.3 billion.

Looking at all the harms experienced by young people 15-34 years of age, alcohol is responsible for more drug-related deaths and hospitalisations than all illicit drugs grouped together.

Since coming to office, the Government has had a strong commitment to changing Australia's culture of binge drinking.

In March 2008, the Prime Minister announced \$53.5 million for the National Binge Drinking Strategy to begin to tackle this problem.

The Strategy has seen the successful roll-out of the "Don't Turn a Night out into a Nightmare' campaign, which has achieved high levels of awareness

among young people of the dangers of binge drinking.

The Strategy has seen all States and Territories committing to pilot early intervention programs to divert youth at risk from alcohol from the criminal justice system to the health system.

Under the Strategy, Australia's major sporting organisations have signed up to a national Code of Conduct and training programs to champion responsible behaviour in relation to alcohol.

The Australian Drug Foundation's Good Sports Program, which helps sporting clubs adopt responsible alcohol service and consumption approaches and now involves 3571 clubs.

And finally, grants of up to \$250,000 each have been provided to some 38 community-level projects around Australia to tackle the culture of binge drinking among young people from the ground up.

In April 2008, the Government moved to close the alcopops tax loophole, to try to reduce the risk of young people being introduced to heavy drinking through sugary sweet drinks which mask the taste of alcohol.

I am happy to report that, according to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics reporting, in the financial year following the closure of the alcopops tax loophole, consumption of these drinks fell by 30 per cent.

While there was some substitution to other products, overall Australians consumed on average some 3.5 million fewer spirits-based standard drinks per week in the 20 months following the introduction of the tax, compared to the 20 months before.

The Government has moved in the 2010 Budget to build on these successes through the investment of an additional \$50 million over four years in the National Binge Drinking Strategy, including:

\$25 million for a community sponsorship fund to provide local community sporting and cultural organisations with an alternative to alcohol sponsorships;

\$20 million to support further community level initiatives to reduce binge drinking; and

\$5 million to enhance telephone counselling and referrals for people with alcohol-related problems.

### **Other Government initiatives**

In the past alcohol misuse has been excused as part of our culture or a right of passage for young people. As we continue to see the growing cost which is affecting so many lives in our community, we must continue to push for change.

Particularly troubling are the mental health consequences of long-term alcohol and other drugs misuse.

The Australian Government is supporting new innovative ways to engage with young people about mental health. It is a significant problem within Australian communities, with one in five people being diagnosed with a mental health disorder at some point in their lives. In line with the Government's focus on prevention and health care reform, in the 2010-11 Federal Budget the Government allocated:

\$78.8 million to fund up to 30 new headspace sites. These will aid an expected 20,000 young Australians with mental health or drug or alcohol issues each year.

\$25.5 million to expand the early psychosis prevention and intervention centre model.

\$13 million to employ 136 mental health nurses, who will provide an estimated 11,700 sessions of care.

The Government remains committed to being tough on illicit drugs and over the next four years in the health portfolio alone is providing around \$350 million to continue to tackle this problem.

This commitment includes ongoing funding to the drug and alcohol treatment sector through the Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants program and the COAG Mental Health Improved Services for People with Drug and Alcohol Problems and Mental Illness initiative.

It also includes a continuation of funding for the National Illicit Drugs social marketing campaign announced in the 2010 Budget.

Continued investments by governments over a long period have, thankfully, seen rates of illicit drug use coming down, but we need to continue our efforts to drive them down further.

## **Health Reform**

Health reform provides an historic opportunity for the drug and alcohol sector to build on its successes.

With the clarification of financing and policy roles and responsibilities for hospitals and primary health care, and the major reforms to establish Local Hospital Networks and Medicare Locals to help ensure that needs are met and services coordinated at the local level, the Commonwealth and States have also committed to looking at roles and responsibilities and the possibility of major reforms in drug and alcohol treatment services.

COAG will consider the possibility of the transfer of these services to the Commonwealth, or of some other major reform, in December 2010.

## **Tobacco**

Finally, I would just like to briefly mention another success story in public health for Australia and one on which the Government is showing international leadership – and that is tobacco.

On 29 April 2010, the Prime Minister announced historic reforms to tobacco control in this country, including an immediate 25 per cent increase in tobacco excise, mandatory plain packaging of tobacco products by July 2010, internet advertising legislation and an additional \$27.8 million investment in anti-smoking social marketing to reach highly disadvantaged and hard to reach groups.

Minister Roxon announced an additional \$5 million for Quitlines to coincide with World No Tobacco Day on 31 May.

The daily smoking rate in Australia has come down from 27.8 per cent in 1998 to 16.6 per cent in 2007.

These reforms will help the Government reach the COAG National Healthcare Agreement target of reducing that rate to 10 per cent by 2018.

This is an historic achievement and one we should look at for lessons – where relevant – in drug and alcohol control.

## **Conclusion**

Drug Action Week provides a framework for all Australians to consider the way they think and behave in relation to alcohol and other drugs, and consider making healthier choices for the benefit us all.

I want to congratulate all the alcohol and other drugs organisations, community and sporting groups, police and emergency workers, health units and schools for planning activities to mark this year's Drug Action

Week – they will certainly help to raise awareness of the issues surrounding drugs and alcohol in Australia.

In officially launching Drug Action Week 2010, I would like to focus again on the overarching themes – “alcohol is a drug too!” and “looking after your mind!”

I congratulate ADCA for continuing to keep the Government and the community aware of the harms associated with the misuse of alcohol and illicit drugs and the cost we all bear as a community.

Thank you for being part of the launch of Drug Action Week 2010.

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