

MEDIA RELEASE
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Australian Psychological Society supports call for action following release of report on youth alcohol abuse

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) today called attention to the release of the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) report into *Supporting the Families of Young People with Problematic Drug Use*.

This timely report coincides with concerns raised in the past weeks by the Prime Minister, Mr. Kevin Rudd, and his Health Minister, Ms Nicola Roxon, regarding the abuse of alcohol by young people. The report is a hard-hitting reminder of the effects of alcohol on our society, and particularly of the health and social effects on young people and their families.

"The report highlights not only the issues which we are now facing in relation to teenage use of substances, and particularly of alcohol, but also emphasises the role that parents and other adults in the community play as role models and teachers. Young people are taking notice of parental models, and families need support and guidance to address this growing problem," said Ms Lynne Magor-Blatch, National Convener of the APS Interest Group "Psychology and Substance Use".

"We know that nearly all teenagers will be offered drugs, especially alcohol, but also nicotine and the full range of illegal drugs. Many will experiment with drugs, as adolescents will push the limits, and in response to peer group pressure. Also, our culture endorses drug use as a solution to bad feelings of all kinds and as a form of recreation. In this context, it is fortunate that only a minority of teenagers develop serious drug problems but for that minority, their families, and the rest of the community, the costs of this are high. This minority clearly have a vulnerability that is brought out when they are exposed to drug use, and the earlier they are given access to effective, research-based treatment, the better the chance of saving them from long-term drug use problems."

Unless there is an identifiable mental health problem, families are not yet able to access psychologists skilled to assist them in changing their own behaviour and assisting their young family members through the Medicare Benefits Scheme. This is despite the recognition by government that 50-80% of people in alcohol and other drug treatment services also have a co-occurring mental health problem.

"The Australian Government has done a great deal to increase access to psychologists for treatment of mental health problems through making items available on the Medicare Benefits Scheme, but there is an ever-increasing need for more psychologists trained in alcohol and other drug interventions, and more services in the community to assist young people and their families".

Psychologists work in the community in a variety of roles, within private practice, in general practice centres and in government and non-government agencies.

The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 15,700 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.

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