Chapter 1: Introduction to the evaluation and monitoring project

Background and purpose of this evaluation of the NDS

Australia’s national drug strategy was inaugurated in 1985 as the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse (NCADA). It was rebadged as the National Drug Strategy (NDS) in 1993, and has progressed through four phases. It is currently in its fifth phase.

On endorsing the NDS in May 2004, the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy also agreed to develop an evaluation and monitoring framework for the current phase of the NDS. The Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs (IGCD) appointed an Evaluation and Monitoring of the NDS 2004-2009 Working Group, which then developed a draft evaluation framework, endorsed by the IGCD and MCDS in 2005, with increased investment and a longer-term approach compared with evaluations of the previous phases.

The evaluation framework had four key components:

1. Evaluate the NDS as a policy framework that informs stakeholders in the development of their respective drug related policies and programs
2. Evaluate the outcomes of programs under the NDS, including cost shared funding model projects (CSFM projects)
3. Evaluate the roles and workings of the advisory structures that inform the development and implementation of the NDS
4. Monitor the performance of the NDS with regard to actual and potential drug issues and drug trends in Australia during the period 2006-2009

These terms of reference were to be applied to assessing each of the four components:

1. The effectiveness of the NDS
2. The efficiency of the NDS
3. Identification of future needs for the NDS
4. Opportunities for future process or other improvements

It was expected that the project would make recommendations to inform development of the next iteration of the NDS.

In 2007, the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) contracted Siggins Miller to evaluate and monitor the current phase of Australia’s national drug strategy within this framework. The purpose of the project was to evaluate and monitor the 2004-2009 phase of the NDS from the perspectives of health, law enforcement, education, Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, non-government organisations (NGOs), and research bodies.

At all stages of the project, the evaluators worked closely with the Evaluation and Monitoring Project Working Group (PWG), and sought the advice of DoHA officers. All aspects of the evaluation method were planned or amended with the approval of DoHA officers and the PWG.

Overview of the evaluation plan and method

The project has been designed and reported around the four components in the evaluation framework: the NDS as a policy framework; outcomes of the national programs funded under the NDS; the advisory structure of the NDS; and the performance of the NDS in actual and potential drug issues and trends in Australia.

While each component is evaluated and presented separately, the four components are intrinsically linked in non-linear, complex ways to influence the achievement of NDS outcomes. The nature and quality of each component has implications for all the others. For example, the
quality of the NDS policy framework and its advisory processes clearly affect the nature and range of the programs, research, and data collection undertaken. External factors in the broader political and social context also influence the intended outcomes of each component.

**Evaluation method**

**Methodological approaches**

In order to meet the requirements for evaluating the NDS in terms of its policy framework, programs, advisory structure and capacity to monitor drug issues and trends in Australia, we recommended (and the PWG approved) an overarching systems approach that incorporated use of program logic and contribution analysis.

The systems approach considered the NDS as a whole, and the social, policy, economic and community context in which it operates. Program logic models spelled out the logic of NDS activities, and formed the basis of matrices setting out the outcomes expected from these activities. The PWG approved the resulting models and matrices.

These methods offered a systematic process for first articulating and then studying the diverse range of factors affecting the success of the NDS, and for identifying appropriate research methods, data sources and indicators to evaluate the NDS and its component parts.

This program logic approach was supplemented by a contribution analysis to assess the extent of NDS contribution to changes in drug-related harm in Australia. This analysis recognises that the performance of any government program of effort is complexly determined, and that even large complex government programs only ever make a contribution to outcomes.

Information was gathered from multiple data sources and triangulated to identify key findings and issues and to inform the development of recommendations. For each key component, a set of research activities was performed, consisting primarily of documentation and literature reviews, consultations with stakeholders and case studies.

**Documentation and literature reviews**

An extensive range of relevant documentation was provided to the evaluators, including background materials, and specific documents and datasets we requested. Topical literature reviews also informed assessment of the issues arising in each component. Document and literature reviews were updated regularly throughout the course of the evaluation.

**Stakeholder consultations**

As the PWG directed, informants comprised two main groups: 1) those in the most senior positions and roles in the central agencies of government responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating the NDS and its programs; and 2) those in the most senior roles and positions who were involved in development, implementation and evaluation of programs and in development and dissemination of research evidence relevant to the NDS. In most cases, the informants were nominated by the PWG and DoHA. For some case studies DoHA also nominated a contact person to provide the evaluators with further advice on the informants specific to a case study.1

Stakeholder consultations were done in two stages. The first stage gathered information and opinion about the components of the NDS and the first set of case studies; the second stage collected responses for the second set of case studies and tried to fill gaps in the information gathered earlier from documents, informants, and other data sources. The first interviews were

1 See Appendix B for the list of informants interviewed
conducted between 10 March and 6 May 2008, and the second between 21 July and 2 September 2008. The length of interviews ranged from about half an hour to two hours.

Informants were invited to take part in either face-to-face or telephone interviews. An interview protocol was provided to the informant about a week before the scheduled interview.

Owing to scheduling difficulties, not all the stakeholders invited could be interviewed. Some nominated other personnel to be interviewed with them, and some nominated representatives to be interviewed on their behalf. Altogether, 139 individuals were interviewed in consultations comprising 103 individual interviews, 18 group interviews and two written submissions.

We used literature on drug interventions, the program logic models and outcome matrices developed in consultation with DoHA officers and the PWG, and models of care and resource allocation to design interview protocols to guide the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Two sets of interview protocols were constructed: a general protocol with four sections corresponding to each component of the evaluation, and case study protocols with eight separate protocols corresponding to the eight case studies.

Plans for further consultation at annual reflection workshops were omitted on the advice of DoHA officers.

Case studies

The PWG agreed that a series of case studies would offer closer analysis of certain elements of this evaluation. Cases were chosen on the basis of agreed criteria: the studies should illustrate issues such as jurisdictional coverage and representation; sectoral coverage (health, law enforcement and education sectors); substance type (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs); program size and influence (local or low-level focus, or investment programs vs national or high-level focus and investment programs); and primary funding sources (Australian Government, Council of Australian Governments (COAG), State or Territory).

The cases approved by the PWG for each component were:

Component 1:  National Alcohol Strategy: 2006-2009 (NAS)
National School Drug Education Strategy: May 1999 (NSDES)

Component 2:  Project STOP
Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grant Program (NGOTGP)
Tobacco Legislation

Component 3:  National Psychostimulants Initiative Expert Reference Group (NPIERG)
Alcohol and other drug workforce issues


Data collation and analysis

Information gathered from documentation and literature reviews, stakeholder consultations, and case studies was collated and compared, and in accordance with the terms of reference were assessed for effectiveness, efficiency, future needs, and opportunities for improvements. Emerging findings drawn from this triangulation of data sources were assessed for strength and validity in repeated discussions with DoHA officers, the PWG, stakeholders, the IGCD and supplemented by additional data collections throughout the course of the evaluation.

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2 The consultation protocols may be found in Appendices D & E.
The context and scope of the evaluation

What is described here is not the whole program of effort under the NDS. There are many associated activities that surround and reflect the NDS, and have important implications for its next phase, but are not covered directly in the four components of the evaluation. Ongoing programs and services in law enforcement, treatment and prevention are the core business of many agencies, not all of whom would be immediately identified in their sector, jurisdiction or locality as implementing the NDS.

The NDS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Complementary Action Plan 2003 – 2011 (ATSIPCAP) was not evaluated as part of this project, as it is the subject of a separate evaluation. We highlight the need to link the current report with the evaluation report of the ATSIPCAP to inform the next iteration of the NDS.