Concluding remarks

The NDS has been operating under various names for over two decades. This justifies the prophetic words of the Commonwealth Minister for Health responsible for its initial development, Dr Neil Blewett MP, that ‘...a drug campaign is unlikely to yield many measurable short term achievements... A drug campaign’s success will be measured over a decade’ (Blewett 1987).

For many years the NDS has provided a model for other large, complex social interventions, embodying the fact that continuity of policy and effort is often required (along with other factors) for the attainment of sound outcomes.

The ‘Australian approach’, as it has come to be known, seeks to apply an effective and balanced combination of demand, supply and harm reduction, investments among alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and among prevention, law enforcement and treatment. Its aims remain as valid today as they were in 1985.

The expanded availability of research-based evidence in recent years places the NDS in a better position to respond to current and emerging issues, and to anticipate new developments in an evidence-informed manner.

The context is changing, however. After a period of stability, new policies, structures, processes, resources and expectations are emerging in many domains. The work of the National Preventative Health Taskforce on a national prevention agenda that gives prominence to tobacco and alcohol, is likely to be important to a future NDS. Furthermore, the broadening of Special Purpose Payments by the Commonwealth to the States and Territories, and the introduction of National Partnership Payments under COAG, constitute new opportunities and challenges for developing the NDS policy framework, structures and processes. Australia may also be seeing a greater investment in demand reduction than has occurred to date.

Finally, we acknowledge the contributions that thousands of front-line workers in the policing, health, education, social welfare and allied sectors have made to changing individual, family, community and national well-being. Their contributions, and those of community activists, researchers, policy makers and managers, have been instrumental in maintaining the momentum and success of Australia’s National Drug Strategy.