The community and clinical workforce training activities of the Centre are now kicking into high gear. We have developed and implemented a strategy to contact key government and non-government sectors in the alcohol and other drug workforce to ensure all have been provided with an opportunity to sponsor a free NCPIC training workshop. Many have taken up the offer and we will provide around 30 workshops by the end of the financial year. We will target other workforce sectors in the ensuing months.

Annie reports that the first training sessions undertaken by the training team at NCPIC, occurred in mid February in the ACT where we were hosted by the Youth Coalition of the ACT. The first day of training was aimed at youth workers and the second day was for those who work with adult cannabis users. Approximately twenty workers attended each day.

We were in Melbourne from 14-18 April where we ran a number of workshops with the Bayside Community Health Centre, the Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS), the Department of Justice and St Vincent de Paul. We were also invited to present to students attending the William Angliss TAFE. Several workshops will be conducted in Sydney and other NSW locations between April and May and we are also visiting Queensland from 12-16 May where we will be running workshops in Brisbane, Bundaberg and Townsville. Workshops have also been scheduled to occur in Hobart and Launceston in late May.

If you would like to host a session in your service or are interested in finding out more information about receiving free national training on cannabis, give Annie a call on 02-9385 0127 or email her on a.bleeker@unsw.edu.au.

The next month is very busy with our official launch on April 29th, our clinical training workshop with visiting US expert Professor Alan Budney on 28th April, and the workshop for the development of clinical guidelines on the management of cannabis use disorder on May 1st and 2nd. Please contact Gem Mathieu on (02) 93850208 or g.mathieu@unsw.edu.au for further information on the launch or Prof. Budney’s workshop.

Official Opening of NCPIC
We are proud to announce that the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre is having its Launch and Official Opening on Tuesday 29th April 2008, 9.45am –12.30pm at the Police and Justice Museum (Cnr Albert and Phillip St, Circular Quay Sydney). As part of the program of the day, Professor Alan Budney (University of Arkansas) will present an overview of the long standing controversies surrounding cannabis, particularly withdrawal, dependence, treatment research and policy responses in his presentation “The Cannabis Controversy”.

Article in Body and Soul
Assisting us as we get closer to our official launch date, we were able to get an article into the Body and Soul Magazine which accompanies a range of Sunday papers right across the country. The article focused on cannabis dependence and NCPIC Director, Professor Jan Copeland and Etty Matalon were interviewed for the story. As well as giving some tips to readers about how best to try quitting cannabis, it also gave some extra publicity to the National Helpline – 1800 30 40 50.
research publications
Relevant publications examining issues to do with cannabis that have been published in the last month include the following:


commentary on research
cannabis use and sleep
A comment on Schierenbeck, Riemann, Berger, and Hornyak (2008)
Anthony Arcuri
Schierenbeck et al. (2008) reviewed the research literature relating to the effects of illicit drug use on sleep. Although the authors divide their attention among cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis use, this commentary focuses only on the review’s attention to the effects of cannabis use and withdrawal on sleep.

The review reveals that a number of studies have shown that administration of THC (the primary psychoactive ingredient of cannabis) decreases the time taken between full wakefulness and falling asleep (known as sleep latency), and is associated with subjective reports of greater ease in getting to sleep. There is some evidence, however, indicating that when THC is administered in high doses or to non-cannabis users sleep latency increases.

The authors cite research suggesting that cannabis use reduces Stage 3 but increases Stage 4 sleep (both of which make up slow wave sleep, which is often referred to as deep sleep) and increases total slow wave sleep; but contrary findings have also been reported. In contrast, THC has been shown consistently to decrease total rapid eye movement (REM) sleep (during which the majority of vivid dreams are thought to occur) and REM density. Furthermore, combining THC with cannabidiol (a non-psychoactive substance found in cannabis) has been found to increase wakefulness compared with THC alone.

Schierenbeck et al. refer to several studies suggesting that some tolerance may occur to the sleep-inducing and deep sleep-enhancing effects of cannabis use, and, less consistently, to the REM sleep effects described above. Moreover, cannabis withdrawal has been found to be associated with subjective accounts of difficulty in sleeping and strange dreams, and with increased sleep latency, wakefulness after sleep onset, and REM sleep, as well as decreased slow wave sleep.

The authors point out that such disturbances, which are eased by the resumption of cannabis use, have been hypothesised to make cessation attempts less appealing and more challenging. Preliminary research indicates, however, that cannabis substitution therapy may relieve withdrawal symptoms including sleep disturbances. Furthermore, a recent pilot study suggested that the administration of THC to patients with severe dementia reduces agitated behaviour at night.

In exploring the available evidence, this timely review highlights the dearth of recent, consistent and methodologically sound literature examining the sleep effects of cannabis use and withdrawal. The authors consequently suggest a research agenda incorporating prospective studies of the ability of sleep disturbances during cannabis withdrawal to predict long-term outcome, and randomised control trials of THC for the treatment of selected sleep disturbances, such as those relating to dementia.

reference
The ACT Government would be issuing training on Addiction (NCETA) on drug testing in schools received widespread attention across the country. The report found that testing in schools would only result in mistrust and alienation and would cost up to $255 million a year to saliva test every student. The media reported that alcohol was a bigger problem than drugs in schools with one in five 16-17 year olds drinking at harmful levels, while less than 4% of school students were regular users of cannabis.

jump in drug use among workers
Daily Telegraph: March 24, 2008
A “staggering” one in eight Australians tested positive to drugs at work according to the Daily Telegraph, with cannabis accounting for more than 90% of positive results. The story appears to have originated from one of Australia’s largest drug testing companies who were demanding that Federal and State governments legislate for compulsory drug testing with urine samples in high-risk industries.

zero-tolerance: two students suspended after caught with drugs
Northern Daily Leader: March 15, 2008
This article reports that the NSW Department of Education and Training reinforced its zero-tolerance towards illegal drugs, following the suspension of two Tamworth High students who admitted being in possession of cannabis. In a statement made to the newspaper, a Department spokesperson was reported as saying “When drugs are detected or suspected, principals will advise police and seek their support in investigating the matter. Schools will take disciplinary action against students involved and support legal action taken by police.”

going too tough on grass users
Geelong Advertiser: March 15, 2008
An interesting editorial examines the South Australian Government’s decision to “turn up the heat on its decriminalized marijuana laws.” The author raises concerns about “small-tine personal users” who could get caught up in the policing of any new laws that are introduced. A range of health problems linked to cannabis are discussed but it is the mental health issue that appears to be the editor’s main concern. As he puts it – “Jail, after all, is hardly the way to tackle mental health.”

Each issue we will examine some of the cannabis-related stories that have received media attention across the country. The headlines are listed below in bold, with a short summary and/or commentary regarding the content of the news story beneath.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of a particular story, please contact Paul Dillon at p.dillon@unsw.edu.au.

ACT drivers to face drugs tests
Canberra Times: April 10, 2008
The ACT Government says it will introduce random roadside drug testing in August 2008, in line with all other Australian jurisdictions. The article states that the delay in introducing the strategy was due to their wanting to see how the testing legislation performed in other jurisdictions. They also said that the scientific evidence was now more certain that similar to alcohol, “the big three drugs” cannabis, ice and ecstasy impaired driving ability for the first four hours.

The ACT Government would be issuing a discussion paper in May about the introduction of random roadside drug testing. The paper would have a consultation period of six to eight weeks. Legislation for random roadside drug testing that incorporated community views would then be tabled in August.

The discussion paper would seek community views on such issues as whether legal drugs should be tested for and whether offences should be summary.

farmers to get go-ahead to grow hemp
Sydney Morning Herald: April 9, 2008
The NSW government have plans to introduce a new licensing scheme to encourage local farmers to grow hemp. Industrial hemp is a species of cannabis, but it has low tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) compared to other forms of cannabis plants and cannot be used as a drug. According to the article, Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald said a potentially lucrative industrial hemp industry was not far off.

“Industrial hemp fibre produced here in NSW could pave the way for the establishment of a new viable industry that creates and sells textiles, cloth and building products made from locally grown hemp,” Mr Macdonald said.

“There is growing support from the agricultural sector for the development of such a new industry. This is a direct result of the environmentally-friendly nature of industrial hemp and a perceived interest for hemp products in the market.”

study into pot effects
Wanneroo Times: April 8, 2008
WA’s Edith Cowan University School of Psychology is seeking volunteers for case studies to examine the effects of cannabis use on families. The study aims to identify the benefits, harms and risks associated with parental cannabis use from the perspective of users and their families. For more information email kdonogh@student.ecu.edu.au.

MardiGrass the time to put case on the table
Northern Star: April 7, 2008
This short article discusses Nimbin’s annual MardiGrass Festival and one of its organizers, Michael Balderstone, suggesting that it is “the ideal time for the community to discuss models of decriminalization” for cannabis.

dope use a crazy idea
MX: March 28, 2008
Young people in Britain will now get a stronger warning from the UK Government on the dangers of cannabis than they have done previously. According to the article, the Government’s “controversial drugs advice website” (which we would presume is Frank) will now warn that anyone who uses cannabis risks their mental health. Previously it said that “cannabis should only be avoided by those who already suffer mental health problems.”

pocket money link to drug use
The Age: March 26, 2008
The results of a report written by the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) on drug testing in schools received widespread attention across the country. The report found that testing in schools would only result in mistrust and alienation and would cost up to $255 million a year to saliva test every student. The media reported that alcohol was a bigger problem than drugs in schools with one in five 16-17 year olds drinking at harmful levels, while less than 4% of school students were regular users of cannabis.

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cannabis use by secondary school students:
what do we know?

The Australian secondary school students’ use of over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2005 Report describes the results of the fourth such survey conducted in this country. The survey was conducted in 2005 and involved the collaboration of State and Territory Health Departments and cancer organizations.

In each State and Territory, a representative sample of secondary schools (including government, Catholic and independent) was selected for surveying, and from each school up to 80 students were surveyed. The report is based on data collected from 21,805 male and female students aged 12–17 years surveyed in 376 schools.

Cannabis was the most commonly used illicit substance among secondary school students, especially among those in the older age groups. Eighteen per cent of those surveyed had used cannabis at some time in their lives. In all time periods, the proportion of students using cannabis increased with age; for example, levels of ever use increased significantly from 5% of students aged 12 years to 32% of 17-year-olds.

Not surprisingly, as time periods became more recent, fewer students reported having used cannabis. Use in the past year increased significantly across age groups, from 3% of students aged 12 to 25% of 17-year-old secondary school students, while use in the past month increased from 2% of 12-year-olds to around 12% of students aged 16.

Seven per cent of all students had used cannabis in the month prior to the survey and 4% had used it within the week before the survey. Weekly use increased with age from 1% of 12-year-olds to 6% of 17-year-olds. Weekly use of cannabis was more common among males than females.

Students who had used cannabis in the past year were asked to indicate whether they usually smoked it as a joint, used a bong or ate it. Bongs were the most common means of using cannabis, with 59% of males and 58% of females who had used cannabis in the past year indicating that this was how they usually consumed it. Joints were used by 38% of females and 35% of males. Students reported that they usually used cannabis with others (86% of males and 90% of females). Only a small number (4% of males and 2% of females) indicated that they usually used cannabis by themselves, with 11% of males and 8% of females indicating that they used by themselves or with others about equally often.

Cannabis was most commonly used at a friend’s place (31% of males and 38% of females), a party (29% of males and females), at the student’s own home (12% of males and 11% of females) and at a park (9% of males and 8% of females).

The proportion of students using cannabis had decreased between 1996 and 2005.

That said, cannabis use was still relatively widespread among secondary school students, particularly older males. Experience with the drug increased with age and in 2005 nearly one third of older students had tried cannabis and around 1 in 10 older students had used cannabis in the month before the survey. The decrease in the proportion of students using cannabis in all recency periods between 2002 and 2005 continues the decrease in prevalence between 1999 and 2002 and between 1996 and 1999.

Comparison Lifetime Cannabis Use Australian Secondary School Students 1996-2005

For a full copy of the report go to:

continued on page 5
cannabis and the Netherlands: what do we know?

You may have heard of the Cannabis Cup, a festival held in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The Cannabis Cup receives widespread international attention with cannabis users from around the world descending on the Dutch capital to sample and select the winners of the competition.

The Cannabis Cup was started in 1987 by the editor of High Times, Steven Hager. The festival is held annually and is one of the most famous cannabis events among pot-smokers and cannabis-oriented businesses. Judges are members of the public who pay a fee of up to $200 to participate in selecting the winners with their task being to examine the potency, taste, smell, curing and overall experience of various strains of the drug. Due to the nature of the competition, the potency of the THC contained in the cannabis can be unusually high. It is often these unusually potent strains of cannabis that get reported in the media, leading the general community to believe that they are the norm rather than the exception.

Sometimes people see these stories and believe that drugs are legal in the Netherlands. This is not true. However, in Dutch law a distinction is made between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ drugs. Hard drugs include substances such as heroin, cocaine, speed and ecstasy. Soft drugs, such as cannabis, are defined as less strong and are regarded as having fewer health risks by Dutch authorities. Soft drugs are also illegal and not permitted by the government. The sale of cannabis for personal consumption by the public, however is tolerated by the local authorities.

A Dutch establishment advertising itself as a coffee shop is likely to be primarily in the business of selling cannabis products and other substances such as ‘herbal highs’, which are tolerated under the drug policy of the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, the selling of cannabis is “illegal, but not punishable”, so the law is not enforced in establishments following these nationwide rules:

- no advertising
- no hard drug sales on the premises
- no sales to minors (people under the age of 18)
- no sales transactions exceeding a quantity threshold (5 grams)
- no public disturbances

In recent years these shops have been subject to much stricter supervision and there are far fewer than there were in the past.

Interestingly an upcoming smoking ban in bars and restaurants will not apply to joints made solely of cannabis. From 1 July 2008, smoking in restaurants, hotels and bars will only be allowed in closed-off areas where no service will be provided. Coffee shops will be included in this ban. However, the Tobacco Act only applies to the smoking of products consisting wholly or partially of tobacco. Cannabis users who smoke their joints without adding tobacco will therefore not be affected by the ban.