

**Alcohol Drug Helpline calls rise dramatically  
10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrated**

The national Alcohol Drug Helpline that was started in Christchurch ten years ago is this week celebrating its tenth anniversary and acknowledging the volunteer who has worked for the Helpline all that time and given approximately 1000 hours of his time helping callers with alcohol and drug problems.

The volunteers will be recognised by Associate Minister of Health (with responsibility for drugs) Jim Anderton and the chief executive of ALAC, Gerard Vaughan, at a function at 6pm today at the Latimer View Hotel, Latimer Square.

The recognition comes at a time when the helpline is facing a severe reduction in the number of volunteers available to run the free phone service.

“It’s getting harder and harder to find enough volunteers to take calls over 12 hours, seven days a week that the helpline is open,” said Alcohol Drug Helpline chief executive, Cate Kearney. “While we have a mix of volunteers and paid employees, we are one of the few volunteer helplines remaining and I think we’re going to have to go the way of the others and find the money to have a fully paid workforce in future. It was a lot easier ten years ago to find volunteers.”

The Alcohol Drug Helpline (0800 787 797) receives around 15,000 calls a year now – a significant increase over the 30 calls it received in its first few months of operation in 1997. In total, over 10 years, the helpline has taken 110,000 calls, over half of them made in the last four years since the helpline was extended to cover other drugs.

“About 60% of the calls these days are about alcohol, which is slightly lower than a few years ago, now that other drugs are of more concern,” Kearney said. “The second most common drug people call about is cannabis, and that hasn’t changed much either. But the drug that is causing increasing concern these days is methamphetamine, or P.

“P has come from nowhere to 12% of our calls, and cannabis from 6% to 13%, so the two drugs now make up 25% of all calls,” she said.

About 60% of callers were female, while 60% of those identified as having the problem were male.

**For further information, please phone Cate Kearney 379 8626 or 021 301 566**