



## Media Release

[6 August 2020]

### **Drug treatment works, but we need to double investment to meet demand**

The specialist alcohol and other drug service system is experiencing a funding and infrastructure crisis as a result of chronic and historical underfunding. The system is full and cannot meet current demand, let alone future demand.

“The ACT’s alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector has proven itself efficient and effective in reducing the demand for more expensive acute health and criminal justice services, improving the wellbeing of Canberrans and saving lives. Already 700 people access specialist alcohol and other drug services a day in the ACT,” said Dr Devin Bowles, Chief Executive Officer of the peak body the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA).

“More Canberrans want to access specialist alcohol, tobacco and other drug services but many programs have substantial waiting times. It is particularly concerning that services with the longest waiting periods are those that work with Canberrans experiencing the greatest severity and complexity of alcohol, tobacco and other drug issues. Over 70% of people trying to access residential rehabilitation in the ACT have to wait to do so, with many waiting up to 3-months”.

“Modelling indicates that we need to double our investment in specialist alcohol and other drug services to meet demand. We are concerned that an increase in alcohol and other drug use and harms associated with COVID-19 will result in more Canberrans needing help from a service system already under pressure.”

“Specialist alcohol and other drug treatment is core business delivery for the publicly funded health service system in the ACT and treatment planning and investment needs to be undertaken with a long-term view. Alcohol and other drug treatment services are also a good investment—for every \$1 invested, society gains \$7, including through reduced demand for acute health services.”

“We welcome the ACT Greens’ announcement this morning consistent with the alcohol and other drug sector’s decade long call to immediately boost funding to double ACT Government investment in AOD services”.

“As an apolitical, non-partisan organisation, ATODA stands ready to provide advice and support to any ACT organisation about investments in evidence-based alcohol, tobacco and other drug initiatives and policy to meet community needs.”

**For further information or media comment please contact Dr Devin Bowles, CEO, Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT on 02 6249 6358**

*ATODA’s purpose is to lead and influence positive outcomes in policy, practice and research, as the peak body for the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector in the ACT.*