



Media Release

[21 December 2020]

ATODA welcomes political interest in drug harm reduction

ATODA CEO Dr Devin Bowles welcomed the new Legislative Assembly's interest in evidence-based policy to reduce drug harm.

"We have been open in our support for Mr Pettersson's private member's bill decriminalising possession of small amounts of illicit drugs. Now we warmly welcome Mr Davis's proposed Legislative Assembly committee inquiry into alcohol, tobacco and other drug harm reduction."

"Australia is the envy of most of the world in its excellent management of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because our political leaders are listening to health experts. It is great news that Canberra's political leaders are becoming similarly receptive to health advice regarding drug policy. Enlightened leadership will save people's lives." said Dr Bowles.

"While Canberra has achieved several important reforms, further change is still urgently required. An inquiry by the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing should look at a range of important topics."

"Canberra's specialist alcohol and other drug treatment providers are experiencing a funding crisis. Research shows that clients in Canberra are highly satisfied with their treatment. Too often, waiting lists are a huge barrier due to under-resourcing, with 41% of clients waiting 8 weeks or more to start residential care. Every time a young person in crisis is turned away from the evidence-based treatment they need is a tragedy."

"Many specialist alcohol and other drug treatment services are in aging buildings which are not fit-for-purpose and not big enough to support the treatment that Canberra's population needs. An urgent review of infrastructure needs should look at the yawning gap that currently exists and make provisions for the future."

"Tobacco is the greatest cause of preventable ill-health in Australia, far ahead of any illicit drug. Many smokers in Canberra want to quit, but many can't afford treatment. Best practice treatment to quit includes nicotine replacement therapy of the patient's choosing and counselling. This is often too expensive for smokers, many of whom are disadvantaged."

"Cigarettes kill about two in three people who are lifelong smokers and can worsen their health for decades before that. Beyond the human cost, the Canberra health system could save huge amounts of hospital and other healthcare expenditure with modest investments in tobacco treatment now."

“Canberra has an educated and open-minded population, and it is right that we should lead Australia in adopting evidenced-based drug policy to reduce drug harms.”

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. 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 policy to meet community needs.