



Media Release: ATODA Welcomes the Extension of the ACT Drug and Alcohol Court

22 June 2023

The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) welcomes today's announcement that the Drug and Alcohol Court has been funded for a further three years and that funding has grown to enable more people to be diverted from the criminal justice system into suitable health care services.

ATODA Interim CEO, Susan Helyar, said "As evidenced by the evaluation undertaken by the Australian National University last year, the ACT Drug and Alcohol Court has made a meaningful contribution to reducing re-offending and provides an evidence-based therapeutic alternative to imprisonment. ATODA welcomes today's announcement.

"Alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) treatment services, including both residential and day programs, play a critical role in supporting the Court and the people who come before the Court.

"This announcement was made one week prior to existing service agreements with treatment services who accept referrals from the Court ending. Without timely notification of contract extensions, services are unreasonably required to operate services without a guarantee that funding will be available to pay for that service. Community organisations accept this risk in order to prioritise client outcomes and retain qualified staff.

"ATODA urges the ACT Government to ensure essential community-based services have certainty of funding several months before the planned end date of contracts and orderly transition arrangements if funding is ceasing."

The ANU evaluation recommended that there be better coordination and collaboration between the Court and the ATOD sector. ATODA's submission to the Statutory Review of the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List Legislation will make several recommendations regarding improvements that should be implemented in the ongoing delivery of the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List. We look forward to working with the ACT Government to implement these improvements.

An effective Drug and Alcohol Court depends on a viable, sustainable and accessible specialist ATOD sector in the ACT. There is a significant gap in investment in ATOD services both nationally and locally, and ATODA looks forward to further announcements from the ACT Government that services in the ACT will be funded to respond effectively to all people who seek support.

For more information or comment, please contact Susan Helyar, Interim CEO, ATODA on 0431 504 805.

ATODA is the peak body for the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector in the ACT. Its purpose is to lead and influence positive outcomes in policy, practice and research by providing collaborative leadership for intersectoral action on the social determinants of harmful drug use, and on societal responses to drug use

and to people who use drugs. ATODA's vision is a healthy, well and safe ACT community with the lowest possible levels of alcohol, tobacco and other drug related harms.

While the term AOD (alcohol and other drug) is commonly used to refer to the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector, ATODA's preference is to use the term ATOD. This acknowledges the role that specialist service providers in this sector play in providing tobacco cessation support, and because tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of the burden of disease in Australia, contributing far more than alcohol or all illicit drugs combined.

Advice for media: Communicating about alcohol and other drugs

Mindframe is funded by the Australian Government and supports safe media reporting, portrayal and communication about suicide, mental ill-health, alcohol and other drugs. Relevant resources include:

- Mindframe Guidelines for communicating about alcohol and other drugs: <https://mindframe.org.au/alcohol-other-drugs/communicating-about-alcohol-other-drugs/mindframe-guidelines>
- Mindframe guidelines for image use in communicating about mental ill-health, suicide and alcohol and other drugs: <https://mindframe.org.au/images-matter-mindframe-guidelines-for-image-use>
- Adding help-seeking information: <https://mindframe.org.au/alcohol-other-drugs/communicating-about-alcohol-other-drugs/adding-help-seeking-information>