



Media Release: ATODA Response to the ACT Government Budget 2023-2024

27 June 2023

The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) welcomes the investments announced today in the ACT 2023-2024 Budget in housing, health services and contribution to cost of living relief via the expanded energy subsidies.

ATODA welcomes the ACT Government's announcement of another extension of the drug checking pilot in the ACT to December 2024. There is strong evidence the drug checking service reduces harm and promotes access to health services. It should be funded as an ongoing component of essential health services in the ACT.

As ATODA commented when it was announced on 22 June 2023, the extension of funding to the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List is also welcome. We also acknowledge long term investment in the Watson Health Precinct – growing residential rehabilitation infrastructure for young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

However, Drug and Alcohol Service Planning modelling undertaken in the ACT indicates that up to 4,750 more people annually require treatment than are currently being treated through existing alcohol, tobacco and other drug services. This is an underestimate as the modelling assumes treatment for only 47% of those people who meet the criteria for dependence, and was undertaken prior to the most recent Census which indicated an undercount of approximately 20,000 persons for the ACT.

ATODA advised in our budget submission that \$12m annually was needed as part of a stepped approach to addressing gaps in the capacity of services to respond to people seeking support.

In a budget that prioritises expansion of health services to meet the needs of a growing population and with clear evidence of unmet demand for health services, it is surprising that alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment and harm reduction services based in the community have not seen a substantial increase in funding. These services include residential rehabilitation programs, day rehabilitation programs, community-based counselling, case management services, withdrawal services, family and carer support programs and peer support programs.

ATODA Interim CEO, Susan Helyar, said “Responding to drug and alcohol use as a health issue is well accepted in the ACT, and there have been significant legislative and policy reforms to divert people away from the criminal justice system. These reforms, in particular the upcoming implementation of the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022, will only be successful with a commensurate investment in quality, evidence-based treatment and harm reduction services.”

Ms Helyar concluded: “We will continue to highlight unmet needs in the community and work together with the ACT Government to achieve the right investment to respond to these needs.”

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>