
Community sector welcomes Government commitment to drug law reform

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS), Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation & Advocacy (CAHMA) and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) today welcomed the ACT Government's commitment to progressing legislation decriminalising small amounts of illicit drugs. ACTCOSS, CAHMA and ATODA support today's announcement from Minister for Health Rachel-Stephen Smith that recognises drug use a health issue and decriminalisation as key to improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our community.

In 2021, Labor MLA Michael Pettersson introduced the [Drugs of Dependence \(Personal Use\) Amendment Bill 2021](#) which aimed to decriminalise personal possession of small amounts of some drugs including cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and MDMA. The Bill was then subject to a Legislative Assembly Select Committee Inquiry, which recommended the Bill be passed with amendments.

ACTCOSS Deputy CEO, Mr Adam Poulter said: "If done right, this Bill represents a unique opportunity for the ACT. Moving toward decriminalising a range of drugs for personal use will have an enormous positive impact, especially for some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in the Territory.

"Good policy on social issues, including drug use, is drawn from an evidence base and strongly values the voice of affected communities. For years, the evidence internationally and domestically has been telling us that decriminalisation yields better health and social outcomes for people who use drugs, as well as their friends, families and carers and the broader community."

ATODA Chief Executive Officer, Dr Devin Bowles said: "We congratulate the ACT Government on taking another step in its leadership of Australian jurisdictions in evidence-based drug policy. We welcome the inclusion of an alternative to the \$100 fine for possession of the listed drugs.

Keeping people out of the justice system will reduce the harm and stigma associated with drug use.”

“This legislation should be accompanied by further substantial investment into the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) treatment and harm reduction sector in the ACT. The AOD sector in the ACT performs exceptionally well but is under-resourced. As the legislation is enacted and stigma is reduced, we will see that demand go up and we need funding to respond appropriately and supportively.” Dr Bowles concluded.

CAHMA Executive Director, Chris Gough said “A clear step towards true decriminalisation has been made today, a step towards the lessening of discrimination and stigma for those in our community. We strongly believe in a supportive, rather than punitive response to drug use. We are calling for this legislation to be designed in close consultation with the most affected members of the community. Meaningful involvement of people with lived experience will result in the most supportive and least harmful legislation.”

“Importantly, we must ensure that the thresholds listed in the legislation reflect the quantities that people actually use. We are lucky enough that research on this has been done here in the ACT and CAHMA supports the current personal possession limits under ACT law as an appropriate framework for Mr. Pettersson’s bill” Mr Gough concluded.

[ACTCOSS](#), [ATODA](#), and [CAHMA](#) each made supportive submissions to the inquiry, along with [Friends and Family for Drug Law Reform](#), and many other community sector organisations, drug experts and members of the community.

For more information or comment, please contact:

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