



Media Release:

One year of drug decriminalisation in the ACT

For release: 28 October 2024

The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) commemorates one year since the implementation of the *Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Bill (2021)*. This is a significant milestone for drug law reform not only in the ACT, but also sets a national precedent as the only jurisdiction in Australia to have taken this step.

ATODA CEO, Anita Mills said “Drug law reform in our community puts the ACT at the forefront of evidence-based legislative approaches to reducing harm from drugs. We know from evidence that decriminalisation reduces stigma, which can encourage help-seeking behaviour for people who need support. Decriminalisation also helps shift the dial on broader community perceptions around drug use.”

As of 28 October 2023, people in the ACT found in possession of small quantities of illicit drugs for personal use have the option of attending an alcohol and other drug health treatment session or paying a \$100 fine. This diversion away from the legal system gives people the chance to talk about their drug use in the broader context of their personal health and well-being.

Anecdotal evidence that has emerged from the specialist ATOD treatment services in the past year indicates the drug reforms have not led to unmanageable new demands on the sector. The ATOD sector has indicated the ongoing importance and value of publicly available information resources to support broad community understanding and awareness of the drug law reforms.

Ms Mills said “One year on, ACT drug law reforms are successfully embedded into our health and policing systems. This has led to strong collaboration across key service sectors to support people who use drugs access appropriate health treatment and support.”

“In the aftermath of the ACT election, ATODA welcomes another opportunity to work with the ACT government to continue to invest in world class harm reduction measures for the community.”

“The next phase of the drug law reform in the ACT requires a robust monitoring and evaluation to ensure that we can map the impacts of drug decriminalisation. ATODA welcomes continued collaboration with government and sector partners to ensure the drug law reforms achieve their intended goal of harm reduction.” Ms Mills said.

For people who would like more information about the drug law reforms, including what the changes mean in practice, what happens at the health session and allowable quantities of identified illicit drugs, please visit the [ACT Drug Law Reforms page](#).

For more information or comment, please contact Ms Anita Mills, CEO, ATODA on 0431 504 805.

ATODA is the peak body for the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector in the ACT. Our 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>