



Media Release: ATODA supports an evidence-based approach

21 October 2025

The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) is disappointed by ACT Shadow Attorney-General, Jeremy Hanson's motion to repeal the *ACT Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act 2022*.

The motion undermines the independent evaluation process attached to the legislation that is still underway and due to report in early 2026. It not only pre-empts the outcome of a rigorous review process but also risks fuelling fear and stigma around the reality of drug use in our community.

ATODA CEO, Anita Mills said:

"The motion weaves together a patchwork of datasets to sell a political viewpoint but it unfortunately misses the point on the key intent of drug decriminalisation – which is diversion. Mr Hanson has incorrectly conflated broader complex issues such as overdose, drug taking patterns and drug driving with decriminalisation."

Drug decriminalisation in the ACT will enjoy its two-year anniversary next week on 28 October. During this time, the ACT government, ACT policing and the alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment and harm reduction sector have worked collaboratively to ensure this important legislative reform was implemented effectively.

Early indicators suggest that the majority of people who have been found in possession of illicit drugs since decriminalisation have successfully completed the health assessment as part of the diversion. This is exactly what the legislation set out to achieve.

"It is very difficult to establish a causal linkage between decriminalisation and overdose," Ms Mills said. "Every death by overdose creates lifelong grief for those who have been left behind and should not be politicised. In the ACT, the fatal overdose rate is currently lower than the last two years and we very much hope to see this trend continue on a downward trajectory," Ms Mills said.

Overdose more broadly is intrinsically connected to the unpredictability of unregulated illicit drug markets. ATODA reiterates that this is why it is so important to have a responsive and evidence-based harm reduction approach built into our health system. This includes needle and syringe exchange services, drug checking and naloxone provision. ATODA would also like to see the establishment of a drug consumption space in the ACT to further build on the service system we have established in our community.

"Treating drug use as a health issue, not a criminal one, is internationally recognised best practice," said Ms Mills. "We are confident that the forthcoming evaluation will find that the *ACT Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act 2022* has made a positive contribution towards helping people access the support they need while reducing unnecessary and often harmful interactions with the custodial system."

For more information or comment, please contact 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 advocate for a strong and sustainable alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector in the ACT, using best practice policy, research and evidence. ATODA's vision is a healthy ACT community with reduced alcohol, tobacco and other drug related harms, served by a high-quality treatment and harm reduction sector.

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>
- Australian Alcohol & Other Drugs Council: [Best Practices for AOD Services in Media Engagement](#)