



Media Release: Two years of drug decriminalisation – treating drug use as a health issue instead of a criminal offence

28 October 2025

Today, the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) commemorates the two-year anniversary of the implementation of the *ACT Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act 2021*, otherwise known as drug decriminalisation.

While the report from the official independent evaluation of decriminalisation is due in early 2026, there are already indications from emerging data that the laws are working exactly as intended.

Anita Mills, Chief Executive Officer of ATODA commented, “Drug decriminalisation in the ACT was designed to divert people away from the justice system and into the health system where they can be supported and avoid further unnecessary harm.

“We know the drug decriminalisation system is working in the ACT, because the majority of people who have been diverted under decriminalisation since 2023 have opted to be referred to a health provider, and have then gone on to complete a health assessment on their drug use.

“This initial contact with a health provider can often be the first time that a person using drugs has a supportive and non-judgemental conversation about their use with a trained health professional. This is important because it helps to de-stigmatise their drug use as a genuine health issue and opens the conversation for potential treatment and support pathways that person can choose to take.

“During the past two years, the alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment and harm reduction sector have worked collaboratively with government and ACT policing to implement the laws in this way, and we are very pleased to see these emerging signs that this work is delivering as intended.

“While we wait for the results of the independent review into the drug decriminalisation legislation - which we are confident will demonstrate the effectiveness of these laws - it’s also important to remember that the laws are one element of a bigger harm-reduction framework.

“Another measure that ATODA is advocating for strongly is the establishment of the first drug consumption space in the ACT to build on and support the current service system,” Ms Mills said.

Similarly to illicit drug decriminalisation, needle and syringe exchange services, drug checking and naloxone provision, drug consumption spaces are widely recognised as effective, evidence-based methods of drug harm reduction.

Ms Mills concluded, “We look forward to continuing to work with ACT Government and other stakeholders to reduce harms from drug use, using the best available evidence to ensure that this is addressed as the health issue it is - and more people access the support they need.”

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](#)