



Media Release

ACT's drug decriminalisation laws helping to reset drug use from a criminal issue to a health issue, independent evaluation shows

28 May 2026

A report from the independent evaluation of the ACT's drug decriminalisation legislation was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly today, with the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) welcoming the findings and saying the ACT Government should be proud of the early positive results of its progressive drug law reforms.

ATODA's acting Chief Executive Officer Anke van der Sterren said the evaluation report shows that the laws introduced under the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022 (the Amendment Act) have achieved their primary goal of diverting people who use drugs away from the criminal justice system towards the health system.

"We welcome the findings from the report which clearly demonstrate that after two years of the drug decriminalisation laws coming into effect, they are working precisely as intended to promote the adoption of a health-based approach towards drug use rather than a punitive approach.

"In the first two years of implementation, drug decriminalisation has resulted in about 70% of people found in possession of drugs for personal use being diverted from the custodial system, with the majority being referred to a health assessment, education and treatment session.

"The ACT Government should be commended for its recognition that criminalisation of drug use does far more harm than good, and for being the first Australian jurisdiction to support this form of evidence-based policy that leads to a reduction in drug-related harms," Ms Van der Sterren said.

The evaluation report shows that beyond the positive rates of health diversion, there have been some improvements in the relationships and interactions between people who use drugs and ACT Policing.

"Drug decriminalisation helps to reframe people who use drugs as individuals experiencing a health issue rather than as criminals, and it also helps to reduce the burden on the courts and ACT law enforcement, allowing them to focus on other critical areas of community justice and safety," commented Ms Van der Sterren.

The evaluation report also recommends that there is continued information and education for the public about health diversion approaches to drug use, which is an important part of reducing existing high levels of stigma and discrimination towards people who use drugs.

“We look forward to continuing to work with the ACT Government and involved government and non-government agencies to ensure that the full potential of this legislation to improve the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs is realised,” said Ms Van der Sterren.

The independent evaluation was led by Professor Alison Ritter from the Drug Policy Modelling Program (DPMP) at the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, in collaboration with the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation & Advocacy (CAHMA) and the Australian National University.

For more information or comment, please contact Anke van der Sterren, acting CEO, ATODA on 0431 504 805 or email ceo@atoda.org.au

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.

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](#)