ATODA

Alcohol Tobacco & Other Drug Association ACT

Annual Report 2025-2026

Leadership and Influence

A Strong Capable Sector

Partnerships and Collaboration

Organisational Sustainability

Our Purpose

A healthy ACT community with reduced alcohol, tobacco and drug related harms, served by a high-quality treatment and harm reduction sector.

Our Values

RECONCILIATION

ATODA acknowledges the harms that have been brought about by colonisation and the complex impacts this has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, health and wellbeing. We are committed to listening, learning and acting on our commitment to reconciliation in partnership with, and alongside ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

INCLUSION

ATODA works to redress the stigma and discrimination that can arise from alcohol and drug use. We recognise that health is a human right for all people. Culturally and linguistically diverse and marginalised populations have a right to access safe, compassionate, culturally appropriate and affordable treatment and care.

EXCELLENCE

ATODA will strive for excellence in policy, advocacy and research on behalf of our membership. This includes building cross-sectoral partnerships, leading workforce and professional development initiatives, research design, implementation and translation, and capacity building for the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector in the ACT.

Acknowledgement of ATODA members, funders and collaborators

ATODA's work would not be possible without its enduring partnerships with services, organisations and people with lived and living experience across the health, community, academic and government sectors. Together, we work towards a healthy, safe and thriving ACT community with the lowest possible levels of alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related harm. We are grateful for the support of our members and acknowledge our 2025-26 funders, the ACT Health and Community Services Directorate and the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

Accredited at Certificate Level of the Australian Service Excellence Standards

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Acknowledgment of Traditional Custodians

ATODA proudly acknowledges the Ngunnawal peoples as Traditional Custodians of the land we work on and recognises all other peoples or families with connections to the ACT and region.

ATODA acknowledges, respects and celebrates the continuing cultures and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the life of the ACT and region. We respect and value the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector.

Artist recognition
Title: Unspoken History, Map of Pain
Artist: Sharon
Date: 2020

To learn more scan the QR code:

Progressing Reconciliation

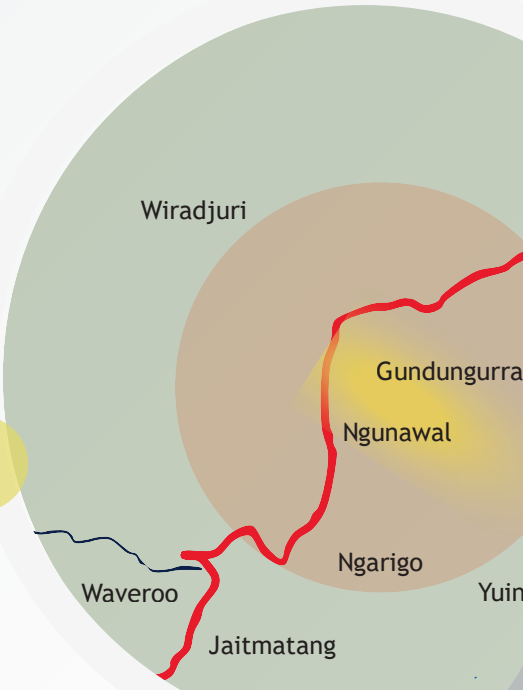
ATODA continues to uphold reconciliation as a core organisational value. We recognise the harms that have been brought about by colonisation and the complex impacts this has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, health and wellbeing. We are committed to listening, learning and acting on our commitment to reconciliation in partnership with, and alongside ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

During the first year of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), ATODA has continued to strengthen cultural safety, deepen organisational learning and embed reconciliation across our governance, advocacy and day-to-day practice. Building on the foundations of our Reflect RAP, the Reconciliation Working Group has supported implementation of agreed actions and helped identify practical opportunities for ATODA to advance reconciliation in ways that align with our role as the ACT's alcohol and other drug peak body.

Our partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are central to this work. Such partnerships strengthen our collective capacity to advocate for culturally safe, community-led responses to alcohol and other drug-related harms, within a framework of reconciliation and self-determination.

In the second year of our Innovate RAP, ATODA will continue to listen, learn and be accountable for delivering our commitments. We will work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and ACCOs to identify opportunities for collaboration, support the vital work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and ensure reconciliation remains an active and meaningful part of our organisational practice.

We are grateful for the continuing support and contributions of Monica Ruffy, a founding member of our Reconciliation Working Group and a proud Aboriginal woman from the Yuin Nation on the South Coast of NSW. You can view our RAP on the ATODA website.



Message from the Board



Vanessa Gstrein
ATODA Interim Board Chair

It is a privilege to present ATODA's Annual Report for 2025–26, a year marked by significant achievement, change and renewed opportunity for the alcohol and other drug sector in the ACT.

Guided by our Strategic Plan, ATODA provided strong, evidence-informed leadership on issues that matter to members, the sector and the community. From championing accessible and sustainable opioid dependence treatment to strengthening lived and living experience participation in our flagship Service Users' Survey of Outcomes, Satisfaction and Experience (SUSOSE), ATODA has worked steadfastly in the service of the sector.

ATODA has continued to exercise leadership and influence to support progressive and evidence-based harm reduction policies in the ACT as well as ensuring our voice is heard at the national level. Our active engagement in policy discussions reflects a commitment to ensuring that member expertise, evidence-informed practice, and the perspectives of people with lived and living experience shape policy and decision-making.

At the heart of ATODA's work is a commitment to partnerships and collaboration. As a peak body, ATODA must remain accountable to its members and capable of representing diverse views and perspectives. It does this by actively consulting, deliberately listening and exercising considered leadership. The successful outcomes and progress shared throughout this Annual Report are a testament to the skills and expertise demonstrated by the ATODA team.

Reconciliation continues to be embedded across ATODA's governance and strategy through the first year of its Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan. The Board remains committed to listening, learning and being accountable, and to strengthening respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations.

I would like to recognise the contribution of CEO Anita Mills who was instrumental in guiding ATODA through a complex period of change in the sector prior to her departure in May this year. Her dedication and professionalism engendered in the Board a high level of confidence in the management of the organisation. We have been very fortunate to have Anke van der Sterren step so ably into the role of Acting CEO, providing continuity for ATODA. I thank Anke and the whole team for their expertise, passion and commitment.

There was also change for the Board of ATODA over the last 12 months. The Board has greatly benefited from the injection of new members following last year's Annual General Meeting.

I acknowledge my fellow Board members' stewardship and support for the organisation, not least of all at a time when we farewelled Sharon Tuffin as Chair. Sharon is sorely missed by us, having served on the Board since 2015, and as Chair since 2018. Thank you Sharon for your commitment and outstanding service to the sector.

While change has been a theme, so too has been renewal. The strong foundations and clear purpose and vision of ATODA fill me with confidence that it will continue to be a leading organisation, not just for the alcohol and other drug sector but in the broader ACT community.

Vanessa Gstrein
ATODA Interim Board Chair

ATODA Board



Sharon Tuffin
Chair
Appointed
2 year term
AGM 2024
Resigned, August 2026



Vanessa Gstrein
Interim Chair
Deputy Chair
1 year term
AGM 2025
Appointed Interim Chair, September 2026



David Baxter
Treasurer
Appointed
2 year term
AGM 2025



Thomas Booth
Secretary
Appointed
1 year term
AGM 2025
Resigned, May 2026



Abbey Andrews
Board Director
Appointed
2 year term
AGM 2024
Appointed Secretary, May 2026



Bronwyn Hendry
Board Director
Appointed
2 year term
AGM 2024



Emily Lenton
Board Director
Appointed
2 year term
AGM 2025



Kellie Friend
Board Director
Appointed
2 year term
AGM 2025



Simon Temby
Board Director
Appointed
1 year term
AGM 2025

For more about the ATODA Board, click here

Board meetings 2025–26

5 September 2025	17 October 2025	**21 November 2025 (AGM)**	6 March 2026	8 May 2026

Treasurer's Report

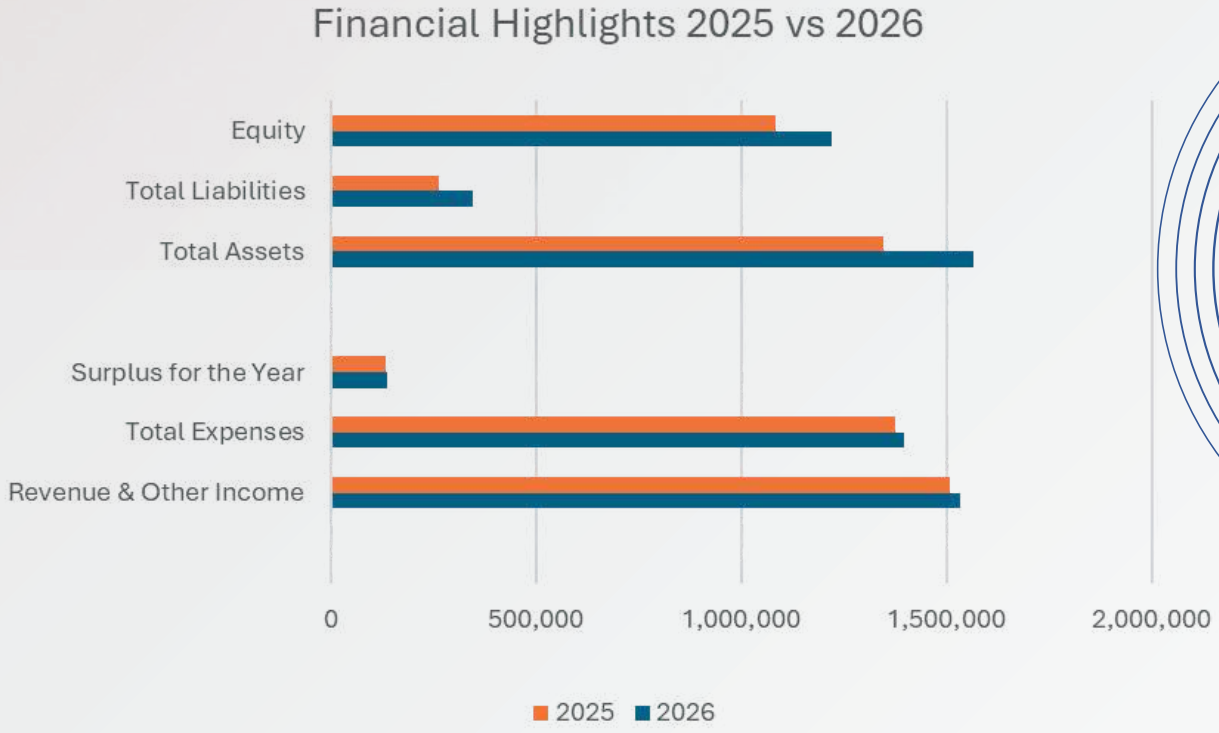
I am pleased to present the Treasurer's Report for the financial year ended 30 June 2026.



David Baxter
Treasurer

ATODA's 2025–2026 annual financial audit is complete, with the independent auditor issuing an unqualified opinion confirming the financial statements present a true and fair view of the organisation's financial position and performance and comply with applicable accounting standards.

ATODA recorded total revenue of **$1,531,945** and total expenses of **$1,396,393** for the reporting period, resulting in a surplus of **$135,552** and reflecting a sound financial position.



ATODA remained in a strong and sustainable financial position throughout 2025–2026.

Revenue increased by 1.5% and expenditure by 1.6%, reflecting stable operations and prudent financial management. The annual surplus increased by 0.7%, continuing the organisation's positive financial performance.

The organisation's financial capacity strengthened during the year, with:

16.3%
increase in total assets

12.5%
equity growth through accumulation of retained earnings

While total liabilities increased by 31.9%, this was primarily attributable to grant funding received in advance and normal timing differences in payables.

Overall, ATODA remains financially sustainable and well positioned to deliver on its strategic priorities and continue supporting the ACT alcohol and other drugs sector.

I sincerely thank ATODA's funding partners for their ongoing support and contributions during the year. I also acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Board Directors, Chief Executive Officer, and staff for their commitment to strong governance, accountability, and sound financial stewardship.

David Baxter
Treasurer

Report on the Audit of the Financial Report

I have audited the financial report of the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT Incorporated (the registered entity), which comprises the statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2026, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the responsible entities' declaration.

In my opinion the financial report of the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT Incorporated has been prepared in accordance with Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*, including:

a. Giving a true and fair view of the registered entity's financial position at 30 June 2026 and of its financial performance for the year ended; and

b. Complying with Australian Accounting Standards and Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013*.

David Perceval, Fellow Chartered Accountant
Institute of Chartered Accountants Australia #45109

21 August 2026
Canberra, ACT

Message from the Acting CEO



Anke van der Sterren
Acting CEO

It is my pleasure to present ATODA's Annual Report for 2025-26, a year of strong achievement, and continued progress towards our vision of a healthy ACT community with reduced alcohol and other drug-related harms.

Before reflecting on the year, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of Anita Mills, who served as ATODA's Chief Executive Officer until May 2026.

Through her leadership, professionalism and commitment to the sector, Anita helped strengthen ATODA's reputation as a trusted advocate and partner. On behalf of the Board, staff and members, I thank Anita for her dedication and support to the AOD sector.

As I stepped into the role of Acting CEO, I was fortunate to be supported by a highly capable team, an engaged Board and a membership committed to improving outcomes for people affected by alcohol and other drug-related harms. Together, we have continued to deliver on the priorities set out in ATODA's Strategic Plan.

Leadership and Influence

ATODA continued to provide strong, evidence-informed leadership on alcohol, tobacco and other drug policy in the ACT. We made 11 policy submissions, published position statements on gambling harms and custodial health, and contributed to public debate on issues including decriminalisation, drug checking, tobacco control and harm reduction. Through our engagement with government, stakeholders and the media, we ensured the expertise of the ACT sector was represented in policy and decision-making processes.

A Strong and Capable Sector

A major highlight was the release of the ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Sector Workforce Profile 2025, providing valuable evidence to support workforce planning and development. We delivered a broad range of workforce development initiatives, including qualifications and training programs, gambling harm resources, nicotine dependence treatment initiatives and harm reduction training. We also continued to strengthen lived and living experience participation through projects including the Service Users' Survey of Outcomes, Satisfaction and Experience (SUSOSE) and our collaboration with the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA).

Partnerships and Collaboration

Partnerships remain central to ATODA's work. This year we continued to support collaboratives approaches through the ACT AOD Executives' Group, ACT AOD Workers' Group and the ACT AOD & Mental Health Alliance. We also hosted our inaugural Community Connections BBQ, creating opportunities to strengthen relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the broader community sector.

Through these partnerships, we amplified the collective voice of the sector and strengthened our capacity to address complex challenges together.

Organisational Sustainability

ATODA remained financially strong and well positioned to deliver on its strategic priorities, recording a surplus and continued growth in organisational assets and equity. We also expanded our communications, launched new publications and continued investing in research, evaluation and quality improvement to ensure ATODA remains responsive, sustainable and effective.

I thank our members, funders, partners, Board and staff for their commitment and collaboration throughout the year. The achievements outlined in this report reflect our collective efforts and our shared commitment to reducing alcohol and other drug-related harms in the ACT.

Anke van der Sterren
ATODA Acting Chief Executive Officer

ATODA Team



Anita Mills
Chief Executive Officer
to May 2026



Anke van der Sterren
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Acting CEO from May 2026



Tess Rogel
Business Manager



Elisabeth Yar
Policy and Research Manager



Annie Bleeker
Senior Training Specialist



Ava Gajdatsy
Policy Officer



Karina Martin
Projects Officer



Tom Urban
Policy and Engagement Manager
(The AOD-MH Alliance)

ATODA extends thanks to **Erin Dineen**, Policy and Projects Lead for the AOD-MH Alliance

THANK YOU!

ATODA's Strategic Objectives

Leadership & influence

ATODA leadership and influence will support progressive and evidence-based harm reduction and alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment policies in the ACT.

A strong & capable sector

ATODA members will have the skills and tools needed to maintain and grow a specialist workforce to deliver high quality alcohol, tobacco and other drug harm reduction and treatment services in the ACT.

Partnerships & collaboration

ATODA effectively represents the interests of our membership, through building strategic collaborations and strong partnerships.

Organisational sustainability

ATODA maintains strong relationships with our key funders, while seeking opportunities for organisational growth and revenue diversification.

Supporting the delivery of actions against the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022-2026

ATODA is a key partner in delivering actions under the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022–2026 (DSAP). Many of the activities listed in this report align with actions under the DSAP.

The implementation and evaluation of the DSAP is supported by three governance groups. ATODA represents the interests of the sector in all three of these groups, attending meetings of the following in 2025–26:

- DSAP Implementation Working Group to which ATODA provided regular updates of progress on actions against the DSAP within ATODA's sphere of influence and provided input and feedback to the ATODS Policy Team as requested.
- DSAP Evaluation and Monitoring Sub-Committee.
- AOD Community of Practice at which ATODA presented findings of the Workforce Profile.

Engaging with Members and Stakeholders

ATODA extends our deepest gratitude to our members for their outstanding commitment and support in 2025–26.

As a peak body, ATODA draws its strength from the collective voice, expertise and commitment of its AOD and allied sector member organisations and individual experts. We thank our members for working with us to strengthen the sector, advance meaningful reform and achieve shared goals across policy, advocacy, research and communication.

ATODA's members

- ACT Shelter
- Alcohol and Drug Programs, Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn
- Alcohol and Drug Services, Canberra Health Services
- Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy
- Canberra Recovery Services, The Salvation Army
- David McDonald (Lifetime Honorary Member)
- Directions Health Services
- Dr Anna Olsen
- Emily Lenton
- Families ACT
- Family Drug Support
- Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation
- Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT
- Hepatitis ACT
- James Poole
- Karralika Programs
- Mental Health Community Coalition ACT
- Mental Health Foundation ACT
- Meridian
- Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT
- Simon Temby
- Ted Noffs Foundation
- Toora Women Inc.
- Vanessa Gstrein
- Volunteering ACT
- Wellways Australia ACT
- Woden Community Service
- Youth Coalition of the ACT

Members Forum

As part of ATODA's commitment to keeping members informed and providing opportunities for feedback and input, ATODA held a members' forum and afternoon tea in December 2025. Approximately 20 members, guests and representatives of the ACT ATODS Policy Team attended. ATODA provided updates on key projects, policy and research activities, findings from the ACT AOD Workforce Profile, and the AOD–Gambling Co-occurring Harms Practice Guide.

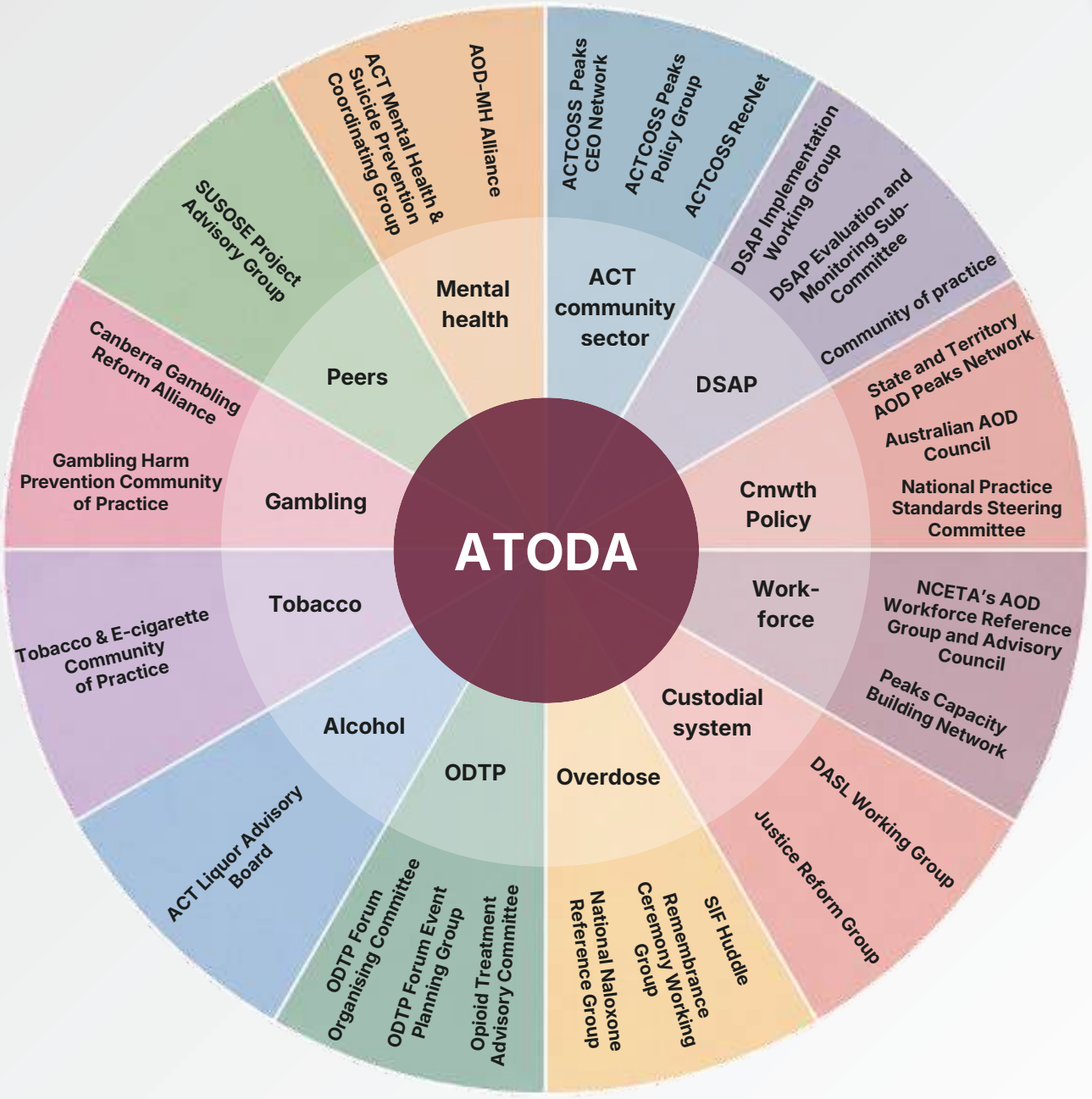


Members forum attendees, ATODA office

> **ATODA's work and output is always of an impressive quality and grounded in evidence, which strengthens the organisation's credibility and stature.**
>
> – Respondent ATODA member and stakeholder survey 2026

Areas of Engagement

ATODA engages across a number of key themes. The table below shows the diversity of groups, committees, communities of practice, networks and alliances at which ATODA promotes and advocates for the interests of the sector.



ACT AOD Executives' Group

The ACT AOD Executives' Group is convened by ATODA and provides an opportunity for Executives of specialist non-government and government AOD services in the ACT to meet on a regular basis. It provides a mechanism for information-sharing, discussion and collaborative decision-making across policy, advocacy, projects and sector development. In 2025–26, nine Executives' Group meetings were held. At these meetings, the Senior Director (or a delegate) from the ACT Government's ATODS Policy Team provided a briefing and responded to questions on items of interest to AOD Executives.

Guest speakers throughout the year included AADC Chief Executive Officer Melanie Walker, who presented on national policy issues relevant to the sector; the Commonwealth Assistant Secretary for the Alcohol, Drugs and Food Branch; the Supreme Court judge overseeing the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List (DASL); and University of Wollongong researchers involved in the Building Belonging Project (Groups for Belonging).

Engagement with the mental health sector

The ACT AOD & Mental Health Alliance is a joint initiative of the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) and the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT (MHCC ACT). It exists for people who live with both mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) needs. Support for these needs is often organised separately, which can leave people working across two systems at once. The Alliance works alongside both sectors in the ACT to help services know each other better, work together more easily, and strengthen care that responds to both needs at once. For more about the activities of the ACT AOD & Mental Health Alliance in 2025–26, click here.

ACT AOD & Mental Health Alliance

The year in review

A partnership between ATODA and MHCC ACT, funded by the ACT Government

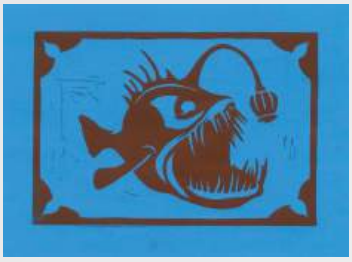
102	188	4	13
Bus Tour seats filled by workers from 22 organisations	**training places taken up across 21 organisations**	**Communities of Practice launced in 2026**	**Australian and international systems reviewed**

Community Connections BBQ

In March 2026, ATODA held its inaugural Community Connections BBQ, inviting members and allied sector stakeholders to an informal networking event. The Community Connections BBQ had a particular focus on building connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and other AOD and community sector organisations.

We value the leadership, expertise and community authority of our ACCO partners and members, and we seek to build respectful, reciprocal and enduring relationships that support self-determination. These partnerships strengthen our collective capacity to advocate for culturally safe, community-led responses to alcohol and other drug-related harms.

ATODA-CAHMA Art Exhibition



Title: Poppie Angler
Artist: Taylor Munday



Title: Ocean Shores
Artist: Claire Middleton



Title: Green Light
Artist: Anonymous

ATODA was pleased to host a diverse selection of artwork from CAHMA clients in 2025–26. The ATODA–CAHMA art exhibition was a project that allowed people who use drugs and/or are engaged with CAHMA, to display artwork for sale at the ATODA office. In 2025–26, seven artworks were sold. All profits from sales were returned to the artists.

Remembrance Ceremony

ATODA is part of a Working Group including former members of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, Uniting NSW/ACT, Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA), and Directions Health Services, to organise and support the annual Remembrance Ceremony for people who have lost their lives to drugs. The ceremony took place on 27 October 2025.



Memorial at Weston Park, Yarralumla

Policy and Advocacy Activities

Advocating for the sector

ATODA advocates for the specialist treatment and harm reduction sector through policy formulation, parliamentary submissions, and strategic partnerships at both the local Territory (ACT) and national (Commonwealth) levels.

ATODA works closely with the ACT Legislative Assembly, the ACT Health and Community Services Directorate, and local allied sector services to promote a health-led, harm reduction approach to alcohol and other drugs. We also collaborate with the Australian Alcohol & Other Drugs Council (AADC) to elevate relevant issues to the Commonwealth.



Gambling harm event, Fiona Carrick (Independent)



Meeting with Shane Rattenbury (Greens)



Meeting with Rachel Stephen-Smith (Labor)



Meeting with Mark Parton (Liberals)

Submissions to government processes form a key component of ATODA's policy and advocacy activities, providing an important mechanism to influence policy development, contribute to government decision-making and advocate for outcomes that affect our sector.

11
policy submissions were made in 2025-26

Submissions made by ATODA can be found here.

ATODA's policy position statements are developed in response to organisational priorities and informed via consultation with our AOD sector members and relevant stakeholders. This ensures ATODA's advocacy is grounded in sector expertise and reflects shared priorities. In 2025–26, ATODA published two policy position statements:

- Reducing Harms from the Co-occurrence of Gambling with ATOD Use – July 2025
- Custodial Health and Harm Reduction – November 2025

Evaluation of the implementation of decriminalisation legislation

Decriminalisation: Looking back; moving forward

Two years after the introduction of illicit drug decriminalisation in the ACT, evaluation findings indicated that the reform was successfully achieving its primary goal: diverting people away from the criminal justice system and towards health-based responses.

The independent evaluation of the Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act found that nearly 70% of consumer drug offences were diverted over the first two years of operation. Significantly, where no other offence was involved, more than 96% of consumer drug offences resulted in diversion rather than criminal penalties.

The findings reinforce the ACT's commitment to treating problematic drug use as a health and social issue rather than a criminal one. However, they also highlight an important reality: decriminalisation alone does not automatically increase engagement with treatment and support services.

While some concerns were raised prior to implementation that decriminalisation could place additional pressure on the alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment sector, the evidence to date suggests otherwise. The evaluation found no measurable increase in demand for treatment services and relatively low rates of onward referral from the Illicit Drug Diversion Program. Just 4.5% of people diverted were referred on to further treatment or support.



These findings align closely with ATODA's own Qualitative Review of the Impact of the Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act on the ACT AOD Sector, which documented sector experiences before and after implementation. Service providers consistently reported that decriminalisation had not resulted in noticeable changes to client numbers or demand for services during the first two years of operation.

ATODA's review highlights several opportunities to strengthen the legislation's impact. These include expanding the range of services available through diversion pathways, improving public education and communication about the reforms, and ensuring that people experiencing the greatest drug-related harms are able to benefit from the changes. Better community understanding of what decriminalisation does and does not do remains an important part of maximising the reform's effectiveness.

The ACT's experience provides an important example of evidence-informed drug policy in practice. While the results are encouraging, they also demonstrate that meaningful reform is an ongoing process. The challenge now is to ensure that diversion pathways are as effective and accessible as possible and that the benefits of reform reach those who need them most.

Want to know more? Read the full reports:

Ritter A, O'Reilly K, Barrett L, Blunden H, Gough C, and Olsen A. Final report on the Evaluation of the Operation of the ACT Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022.

ATODA, Qualitative review of the impact of the Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act on the ACT AOD Sector: "A step in the right direction".

This piece first appeared in The Peak View Vol 1, Iss 1

Media and Communications

ACT AOD Sector Bulletin

ATODA produced and distributed a monthly Sector Bulletin featuring important sector developments, ATODA project updates, events, resources, conferences, funding opportunities and other relevant information. During 2025–26, ATODA also developed a new sector newsletter, ***PeakPulse***, for launch in July 2026.

Between July 2025 and April 2026 ATODA produced eight Sector Bulletins (815 subscribers) including 2 training Bulletins.

AOD Research Bulletin

The AOD Research Bulletin continued to be a valued resource, keeping the AOD sector and other stakeholders informed of the latest research developments in alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and supporting a solid evidence base. In 2025–26, ATODA developed a new research-focussed newsletter, ***The Peak View***, to be launched in August 2026.

Eight AOD Research Bulletins were produced over the year with a circulation of 835 subscribers at 30 June 2025.





Social Media

ATODA's LinkedIn page features relevant AOD sector updates, resources and information, and notifications of upcoming ATODA publications or events. Importantly, ATODA also disseminates Drug Alerts from the fixed-site drug checking service CanTEST and from interstate, as appropriate. Through its social media platform, ATODA provides the opportunity for its members and allied organisations to advertise their events (e.g., webinars, conferences), training, research projects and surveys, and other relevant information.

488 followers

A 77% increase from 276 in the last 12 months

98 original posts were made with 25,500 impressions

ATODA launched a Vimeo site, posting 3 gambling training videos

News articles, interviews and radio



Tobacco and e-cigarettes

- Media release: ATODA Welcomes Stronger Tobacco Laws: A Vital Step for Public Health – July 2025
- New tobacco laws: WIN News; Mix 106.3 (1/07; 2/07)
- New laws in ACT for illegal tobacco and vapes sales: (ATODA mentioned) Canberra Daily; 2CC (22/10)



Alcohol

- Alcohol online sales and delivery legislation: Anita Mills interview ABC 666 radio (18/03)



Nitrous oxide

- Nitrous Oxide (response to coronial inquest): Anke van der Sterren WIN News (14/04)

Media Spotlight Anita Mills, 27 October 2025

The evidence v the scare campaign: how the ACT's drug law is succeeding

Drug decriminalisation isn't a political ideology - the decision to implement this in the ACT was based on strong evidence that treating drug use as a health issue rather than a criminal issue leads to better outcomes for the individual and the community.

.

Early evidence tells us that that the diversion strategy is working. We know that at least three-quarters 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 is exactly what the legislation set out to achieve.

Read more in The Canberra Times



Decriminalisation

- 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
- Media release: Two years of drug decriminalisation – treating drug use as a health issue instead of a criminal offence – October 2025
- Media release: ATODA supports an evidence-based approach – October 2025
- ATODA response to motion to repeal decrim laws - Anita Mills (starts 18 minutes into recording) ABC Canberra; Mix 106.3/HIT; 2CC; Region (21/10; 22/10)
- Two years of drug decriminalisation: (opinion editorial) Canberra Times; 2CC; CBI Newsroom for MIX (27/10)
- ATODA's media release led to several media engagements, including: Prof Ritter speaking on ABC Breakfast (referred by ATODA); and the Acting CEO (Anke van der Sterren) commenting on Amplify/Canberra Cast and 2CC/2CA Radio (29/05); and being interviewed on ABC Radio Drive (1/06)

Drug checking

- Media release: ATODA reaffirms support for drug checking – September 2025
- QLD drug checking ban: Mix 106.3/HIT (22/09)
- ATODA support for drug checking + novel opiods/nitazine finding: WIN News (Facebook) (23/09)

Workforce

- Media release: New report highlights strength of ACT alcohol and other drug workforce while pointing to need for further investment – March 2026
- Workforce Profile launch: Anita Mills WIN News; 2CC/2CA (12/03)

Infrastructure

- Relocation of Arcadia House (opinion editorial by Anke van der Sterren) Canberra Times (23/06); (Anke van der Sterren) ABC Canberra Breakfast (26/06)

Media Spotlight Anke van der Sterren, 23 June 2026

The suburbs where we live is where Arcadia House's residents need to be

Locating essential health services like alcohol and other drug programs in our communities sends a powerful message that people who have experienced substance use dependence are valued members of society and that when they have achieved their health goals, they will be able to return to their homes, families and communities and pick up the lives they were living before the impacts of substance use.

While it may not always be visible, alcohol and drug use occurs across every suburb of Canberra. The choice isn't between a safe community and one with people experiencing substance use disorders.

Instead, it's a choice between leaving people to struggle without support, thereby potentially fuelling cycles of crisis, homelessness, and harm, or providing pathways to escape this cycle.

Read more in The Canberra Times

ACT drug strategy

- Media release: ATODA welcomes ACT Drug Strategy mid-point report and harm reduction review – July 2025
- Media release: ATODA's analysis of the ACT Budget 2026–27
- DSAP mid-point /harm reduction review: WIN News (Facebook); Canberra Daily; Capital network radio; Region Canberra (7/07; 11/07)

Research Activities

Service Users' Survey of Outcomes, Satisfaction and Experience (SUSOSE)



Since 2009, ATODA has been funded to develop and implement, in partnership with the AOD sector, a survey of people who use ACT AOD services. The survey collects demographic information and captures service users' experiences, including satisfaction and self-reported outcomes.

The 2023 survey—the fifth iteration—was developed through a co-design process involving service users, peer workers, AOD service providers, policymakers and researchers.

In 2025-26

The SUSOSE Project Advisory Group met

9

times

3

new members were recruited, bringing the total membersip to 17

12

members of the Project Advisory Group are peers or service users

The Project Advisory Group presented findings from the SUSOSE, reviewed and revised the SUSOSE survey tool, including undertaking further work on the AOD-specific experience measure, consulted the sector on implementation and appropriate timeframes for the next survey, and submitted a new ethics application.

In August 2025, peer representatives from the PAG co-developed and co-presented an NDARC webinar, *Collaborative development of an experience measure: Insights on lived experience involvement from the SUSOSE Project*.



The ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Sector Workforce Profile 2025

The ACT AOD Workforce Profile is a triennial survey of organisations and workers across the ACT alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector. Participating organisations complete an Organisation Survey, while workers are invited to complete an online Workers' Survey. Together, the findings provide a strong evidence base for ATODA's workforce development and sector capacity-building activities.

In 2025–26, ATODA analysed the survey data and published the ACT AOD Workforce Profile report, translating the findings into evidence to support sector planning and development. The report was launched by the Minister for Health Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA on 12 March 2026. ATODA also undertook a separate analysis of organisation-level data and provided tailored findings to participating organisations, helping them apply the results to their own workforce planning and service development.

A randomly selected worker in the sector is more likely to...



ACT AOD Workforce Profile Launch, 2026



A Snapshot of the Sector

The ACT AOD Workforce Profile sits alongside other data to inform our understanding of the sector and to help ATODA identify needs as part of our commitment to building a strong and capable sector.

11 AOD treatment and harm reduction services



1 Government service
10 Non-government services

104 residential rehabilitation beds



across **5** services

8 services offering AOD counselling



Waitlists for counselling are longer than for any other intervention type

5 withdrawal services

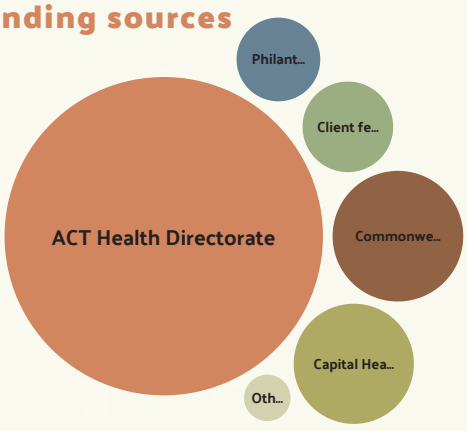
4 services with prison-based programs

2 youth-specific services

2 ACCOs

1 women-only service

Funding sources



400 people employed in the sector

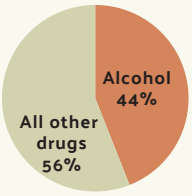
287 FTE positions



3600 people accessing AOD services in a year

6000 episodes of care in a year



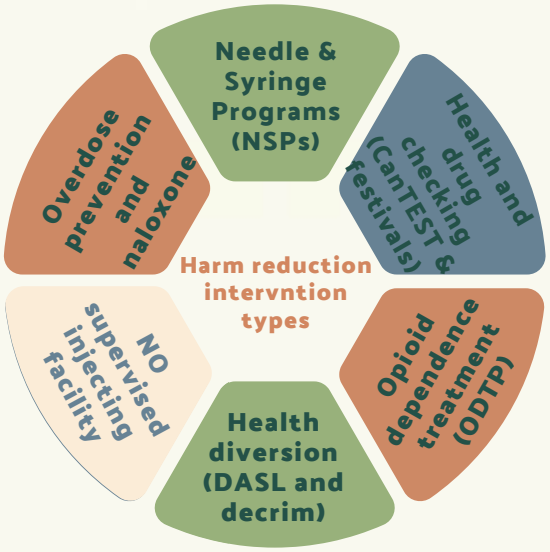


Treatment episodes by primary drug of concern

81.8% of AOD service users were smokers when they first started to use the service







5 services that provide access to peers

1 peer-led service

Conferences

In 2025-26, ATODA staff attended and presented at the following conferences.

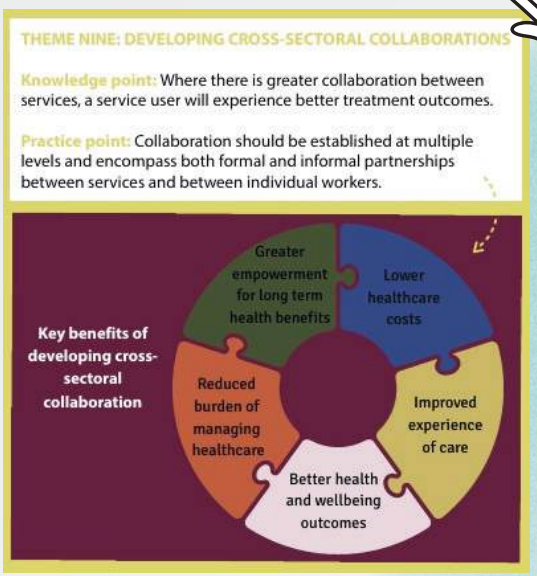
APSAD

The 44th APSAD Conference, hosted by the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs (APSAD), was held from 9 to 12 November 2025 at the International Convention Centre in Gadigal (Sydney).

Its theme was '*Disrupting and deconstructing approaches to drug policy, research and practice*'.

ATODA presented three posters and a poster tour and delivered a presentation titled '*Understanding alcohol and other drug workforce capabilities to inform capacity building around the delivery of comprehensive smoking and vaping programs*'.

To view ATODA's posters click here





Presenting at ISSDP, 2026

ISSDP

The 19th annual International Society for the Study of Drug Policy (ISSDP) conference was held in Perth from 30 June to 2 July 2026.

The theme was '*Connecting affected communities, drug policy and public healh'.*

ATODA presented '*The impacts of drug decriminalisation in the ACT: A step in the right direction*'.

Workforce and Sector Development

ACT ATOD Program Directory

The ACT ATOD Program Directory provides a whole-of-system map of the ACT AOD sector, helping people quickly find key information about available services. AOD workers continued to report that the Directory offers a useful overview of services and supports effective referrals. During 2025–26, ATODA updated the Directory to ensure that changes to program delivery were accurately reflected.





Workers' Group end-of-year event, 2025

The Workers' Group

The ACT AOD Workers' Group is an essential part of ATODA's commitment to strong sector governance. Worker-representatives from each ACT AOD organisation (two representatives per organisation) attend monthly meetings. The group provides a forum to identify and respond to a range of issues relevant to frontline workers and to share information about services and programs across the sector. It supports networking opportunities, in particular building relationships to enhance referrals between AOD services. The group acts as a key advisory structure to ATODA.

Ten meetings of the ACT AOD Workers Group were held over the 2025-26 reporting period, alongside communications outside of those meetings as required. Aside from information-sharing, meetings included:

- guest speakers on topics identified by the members—for example, Havelock House presenting on housing and homelessness, presentation on AIHW data; AOD Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set;
- consultation by ATODA on specific policy issues—for example, group discussion on the implementation of the ATODA Evaluation of the Impact of the ACT Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act 2022 and the Qualifications Strategy review;
- in-depth presentations from AOD services—for example, a presentation on Karralika programs, on CAHMA's Model of Care, and on the running of CanTEST and the NSP;
- presentations on ATODA projects—for example, data from the ACT AOD Workforce Profile; and site visits to services – including Karralika, CAHMA, Directions.

The Qualifications Strategy

ATODA continues to prioritise workforce capacity-building to sustain and further develop a highly qualified AOD sector. This work supports workers to develop the skills required to meet service users' needs within their scopes of practice. During 2025–26, ATODA identified a new provider for the AOD Skill Set, and the Canberra Institute of Technology delivered the first round of training. Twenty students from seven organisations enrolled.



Some of the 17 graduating students, 2026

Professional development opportunities

As part of ATODA's commitment to developing and maintaining a highly skilled workforce, a range of professional development opportunities were made available to the sector, including face-to-face workshops in LGBTIQA+ Awareness and Inclusion training through Meridian. Training offerings were provided in response to priorities raised by AOD services. Furthermore, ATODA undertook analysis of workplace competencies to develop a clearer understanding of need in the sector around training and professional development.

Throughout 2025-26, there were 58 enrolments in subsidised professional development courses delivered by 360Edge.

Gambling



Presenting the Practice Guide during Gambling Harm Action Week 2025

In 2025–26, ATODA concluded its multi-year gambling project, *Alcohol, other drugs and gambling in the ACT: A cross-sectoral approach to harm minimisation*. The project identified a lack of clear guidance for workers supporting clients experiencing co-occurring gambling and substance use harms. In response, the Practice Guide was developed to build the capacity of ACT alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD) and gambling support workers to effectively identify and respond to these intersecting harms.

The Practice Guide was formally launched during Gambling Harm Action Week in October 2025. To further support workforce development, a range of online resources were developed and training videos were made available via the ATODA website.

Peer, lived and living experience workforce support and capacity-building

Capacity building of a lived and living experience workforce is an identified priority in the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022–2026. ATODA supported this objective in 2025–26 by:

- Working with the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation & Advocacy (CAHMA) to articulate their Peer Treatment Support Service Model of Care.
- Providing access to Lived Experience in Professional Practice workshops through 360Edge.
- Analysing and presenting data from the ACT AOD Workforce Profile on specific issues, capabilities and capacities around the AOD lived and living experience workforce.



Attending CAHMA's launch of the Peer Treatment Support Service Model of Care, 2025

AOD Information and Harm Reduction Training

ATODA delivered

3

standard AOD information and harm reduction trainings

Adapted

2

bespoke AOD trainings for CYF

Delivered

2

bespoke AOD trainings to Anglicare

ATODA delivers AOD Information and Harm Reduction Training to workers across the ACT youth, mental health and homelessness sectors through community sector partnerships. The training strengthens participants' knowledge of alcohol and other drug use in the ACT and Australia, provides practical harm reduction and safety information, and creates opportunities to reflect on attitudes towards people who use drugs. Participants also learn about ACT treatment, support and referral pathways.

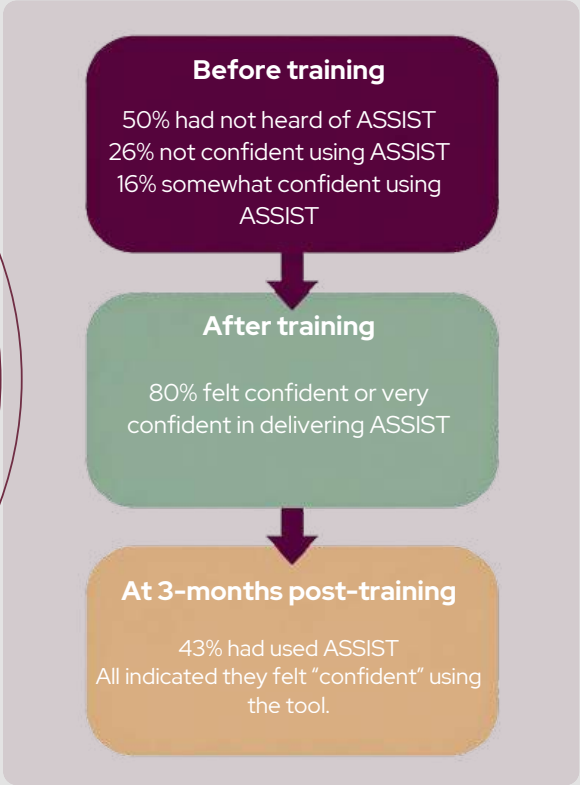
Participants rated the training 'good', excellent' and 'extremely effective; at increasing their knowledge of alcohol and other drugs and related issues. Almost all participants indicated that they would implement something new in their work practice as a result of attending the training.

Trained a total of

81

health and community sector participants

The University Drug and Alcohol Network



The 2025-26 ASSIST Check-Up project provided a two-day comprehensive AOD information and brief intervention training for final year nursing and allied health students to increase knowledge of AOD harm reduction, build confidence in delivering an Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) and reduce stigma amongst the early-career health workforce. It is a training model which is readily scalable and reproducible.

ATODA provided three two-day workshops across the ACT university sector with the support of University Drug and Alcohol Network (UDAN) partners and funding through an Australian Drug Foundation LDAT.

Reducing Nicotine Harms Project

In 2025–26, ATODA launched the Reducing Nicotine Harms (RNH) Project, funded by an ACT Government Healthy Canberra Grant. The project embeds targeted, best-practice nicotine dependence treatment and support within non-government AOD programs, including education, information and access to NRT. Direct funding was provided to participating services to purchase and distribute NRT to service users and workers. ATODA commissioned the Cancer Council ACT to develop and deliver bespoke training for the AOD sector.

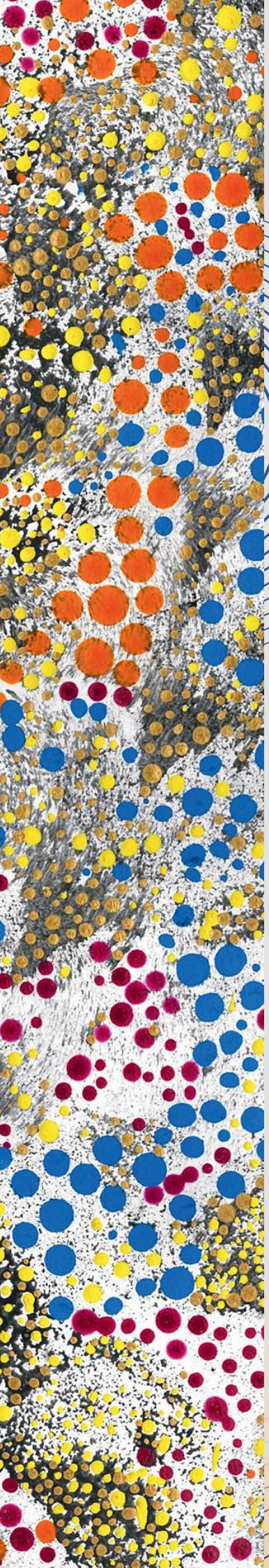
In 2025-2026

Delivered
6
smoking and vaping workshops

42
workers attended the workshops

2
further training sessions were schedules for late 2026

Ongoing evaluation informed changes to the training model, including an online pre-training component and shorter in-person sessions to better accommodate organisational capacity. ATODA also provided project updates to the ACT Tobacco and E-Cigarette Community of Practice.



ATODA

Alcohol Tobacco & Other Drug Association ACT

thank you

ATODA values the continued work of the AOD sector.

Special thanks to our members and partner organisations that support ATODA's work.

ATODA recognises and pays respect to people with lived and living experience of alcohol and other drugs, including individuals, their families, friends, and carers. We acknowledge their contributions to shaping safer, more compassionate, and effective services and policies.

Looking forward to the year ahead!



Thanks to Chloe Sim for her support in preparing this report for publication.

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