



State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drug Peaks Network

Statement

Alcohol and Other Drug Diversion Programs in Australia

December 2020

The State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drug Peaks Network calls for a shared, national approach to address current barriers to accessing diversion programs and to explore opportunities to enhance the diversion system.

Alcohol and other drug diversion programs have a long, established history in Australia and have been demonstrated to deliver a range of justice, health, economic and social outcomes.¹

The importance of diversion programs is recognised within the National Drug Strategy, where it is listed as a key component of demand reduction.² While diversion is nationally supported, diversion programs vary across Australian state and territory jurisdictions, reflecting jurisdiction-specific legislative and legal frameworks.

There is an opportunity to expand and improve alcohol and other drug diversion across Australia. The National Drug Strategy highlights the need to enhance:

*systems to facilitate greater diversion into health interventions from the criminal justice system, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people and other at-risk populations who may be experiencing disproportionate harm.*³

The outcomes of a recent national review of illicit drug diversion programs further reinforce the need to enhance Australia's approach to diversion. The review found that there was significant variability across all Australian jurisdictions in the proportion of eligible offenders given a police diversion, ranging from 32.4% to 98%.⁴ The national review also identified barriers that inhibit progress to collectively improve access to diversion – these range from programmatic (e.g. eligibility criteria) to systemic (e.g. treatment access).⁵

The national review identifies the need for 'building transparency and fostering exchange about efforts to expand diversion is an important way to build diversion going forward.'⁶

¹ Hughes, C., Seear, K., Ritter, A. & Mazerolle, L. (2019). Monograph No. 27: Criminal justice responses relating to personal use and possession of illicit drugs: The reach of Australian drug diversion programs and barriers and facilitators to expansion. *DPMP Monograph Series*. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney. <http://doi.org/10.26190/5cca661ce09ce>, p.1.

² Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health) (2017). National Drug Strategy 2017-2026, p. 10.

³ National Drug Strategy, p.23.

⁴ Hughes et. al., (2019). The reach of Australian drug diversion programs and barriers and facilitators to expansion, p.5.

⁵ Hughes et. al., (2019). The reach of Australian drug diversion programs and barriers and facilitators to expansion, pp.6-7.

⁶ Hughes et. al., (2019). The reach of Australian drug diversion programs and barriers and facilitators to expansion, p.8.

A renewed national focus, accountable through the National Drug Strategy, will assist all jurisdictions in: exploring and sharing their approaches to enhance diversion programs and new program opportunities; building on the current evidence base; and identifying data to evaluate and improve access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The national review identified a range of key facilitators that would improve the diversion system:⁷

- Establishing a supportive national policy framework.
- Providing diversion program options for all illicit drugs in all states and territories
- Considering newer models of diversion delivery
- Streamlining referral systems for police
- Increasing feedback mechanisms to police about drug diversion
- Adding drug diversion into police performance monitoring systems
- Contributing evidence on what works and the reach of drug diversion
- Introducing a legislative or hybrid legislative requirement to divert eligible offenders

Given alcohol and other drug diversion is an essential, evidenced component of Australia's National Drug Strategy, urgent shared action is required to maintain and build upon the diversion system's achievements to date, and deliver enhanced health, social, economic and justice outcomes nationwide.

The State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drug Peaks Network recommends that the first step in establishing a shared vision for enhancing diversion is through a national forum with all diversion stakeholders (government, police, justice and alcohol and other drug sectors).

We seek national support to collaborate and co-produce this forum.

⁷ Hughes et. al., (2019). The reach of Australian drug diversion programs and barriers and facilitators to expansion, pp.7-8.

State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drug Peaks Network:

WHO WE ARE:

The State and Territory Alcohol and Other Drug Peaks Network is a capacity-building initiative that comprises of all Australian state and territory peak Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) bodies:

- Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA)
- Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council Tasmania (ATDC)
- Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies Northern Territory (AADANT)
- Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (NADA)
- Queensland Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (QNADA)
- South Australian Network of Alcohol and Drug Services (SANDAS)
- Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA)
- Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA)

OUR VISION:

An Australian community with the lowest possible levels of alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related harm, as a result of the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector's evidence-informed prevention, treatment and harm reduction policies and services.

WHAT WE DO:

The AOD Peaks Network advances and supports alcohol and other drug services in all Australian jurisdictions to prevent, treat and reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related harms to individuals, families and communities. To enable this, we provide expert services in:

- Capacity building
- Sector and workforce development
- Quality improvement
- Education and research
- Information and communication
- Coordination and partnerships
- Information management and data collection
- Representation and consultation
- Program development for State, Territory and Commonwealth governments, including policy advice.

OUR REACH AND WHO WE REPRESENT:

We provide a conduit for immediate access to alcohol and other drug services in all Australian jurisdictions. We represent:

- 435 organisations (primarily non-government), which includes 80% of organisations funded to provide AOD services by the Commonwealth;
- All specialist treatment types (counselling, detoxification, residential and non-residential rehabilitation, opiate replacement therapy) and harm reduction services;
- \$377,905,578 of State, Territory and Commonwealth AOD services funding investment; and
- 80,000 Australians who receive an episode of care annually.

For more information regarding this position statement, Jill Rundle, CEO WANADA at 08 6557 9400.