

The Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT (AADANT) is the peak body for non-government alcohol and other drug treatment services in the Northern Territory.

As an independent, membership-driven, not-for-profit association, we work with our members to support and strengthen Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) service delivery for people who experience harmful substance use in the Northern Territory.

Our mission is to build and maintain a strong, sustainable and culturally diverse AOD sector that works together to reduce alcohol and drug-related related harm across the Northern Territory.

OUR ELECTION ASKS FOR 2020

1. Commitment to maintaining funding to the Alcohol and Other Drug sector to ensure operational stability, workforce development and provision of accessible, comprehensive AOD treatment services.
2. Commitment to implementation and continuation of all alcohol reform measures introduced in response to the Riley Review (Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review) and supported in the report: [*NT Government Position on Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review Final Report's Recommendations*](#).
3. Commitment to providing a health-first approach to AOD management including equitable access to harm minimisation strategies with a focus on demand reduction and harm reduction approaches.
4. Commitment to providing equitable access to medical Cannabis therapies for all Territorians.

1. Commitment to maintaining funding to the Alcohol and Other Drug sector to ensure operational stability, workforce development and provision of accessible, comprehensive AOD treatment services.

I) No reduction in funding in real terms for the AOD treatment sector

The alcohol and other drugs sector provides a vital frontline health role working to assist some of the most at-risk members of our society. The NT has the highest rates of alcohol and other drug use in the country. Social and economic costs stemming from alcohol use alone are estimated at \$1.38 billion per year¹. The current configuration of funding distribution for alcohol and drug management across the NT is in need of review and reallocation with AOD organisations struggling to find sufficient funding to meet appropriate treatment responses and to provide services that address demand reduction. Organisations working in this sector are also facing the risk of funding reductions through cessation of funding streams and a lack of incremental funding increases in line with real term cost increases.

AADANT believes the following provisions are essential to ensure the viability and further development of the sector:

- A sector-inclusive process to reconfigure the current funding distribution to best meet population demand with availability of funding and contract flexibility for organisations to develop and refine service models
- Inclusion of CPI allowance in operational funding models, funding for incremental staff wage growth to encourage retention of staff
- Provision of additional funding to maintain staff pay rates at current levels upon finalisation of the SACS supplementation/Equal Remuneration Order (ERO)

II) Funding to provide embedded therapeutic services in all AOD treatment facilities

AOD treatment services work with some of the most challenging clients that may present to health services. Many clients present with a range of complex issues including mental health and chronic health comorbidities, social disadvantage relating to housing, employment and education, historical traumas, and criminal justice issues.

Despite the complexity of these issues, many organisations working with these clients have limited access to professional therapeutic workers such as psychologists, social workers, or mental health nurses. These roles constitute a vital element to ensuring clients progress through treatment effectively minimising the ongoing potential for harm and reducing likelihood of relapse. AADANT is calling for the provision of funding to allow for the delivery of dedicated therapeutic services within all AOD treatment facilities.

¹ Smith, J., Whetton, S. & d'Abbs, P. (2019). The social and economic costs and harms of alcohol consumption in the NT. Darwin, Menzies School of Health Research.

III) Funding towards a dedicated workforce development program to implement the recommendations of the NT AOD Workforce Development Strategy

In 2019, the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) completed a [Workforce Development Strategic Framework](#) for the Northern Territory AOD sector. This framework puts the NT ahead of the rest of the country in providing guidance to develop the AOD workforce.

The strategy outlines a broad range of recommendations and strategies that offer the pathway to having the most effective, well trained, and well-structured workforce possible. Effective implementation of this strategic framework is a pivotal element to ensuring the sector is best placed to make progress in reducing the rates of alcohol and other drug harms in our community.

IV) Long-term, committed funding for the provision of dedicated alcohol and drug treatment services within the frameworks of the Corrective Services system.

Alcohol and other drug use are a significant factor in the offending behaviour of many individuals who become incarcerated in the Northern Territory. Access to effective, professional alcohol and other drug treatment services for these individuals can greatly reduce the risks of re-offending.

AADANT is calling for the provision of dedicated funding, direct to the AOD treatment sector, to deliver services to individuals in the Corrective Services system. Funding is needed for:

- Prison in-reach services
- Residential rehabilitation services for clients on parole or Community Corrections orders
- Post-prison AOD support services that are integrated with holistic social and health services.

V) Increased funding for the ongoing development of service delivery models for organisations working with young people who use drugs.

At present, service offerings that respond to young people who use drugs and alcohol are siloed with limited engagement across sectors. A wholistic, collaborative approach that effectively identifies and addresses the needs of these young people is required. AADANT has received limited, one-off funding to investigate this issue but there is a need for ongoing, increased investment to continue the integration of sectors working with this cohort of young people.

2. Commitment to implementation and continuation of all alcohol reform measures introduced in response to the Riley Review (Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review) and supported in the report: [NT Government Position on Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review Final Report's Recommendations](#)

The Riley Review and subsequent implementation of a broad range of policy reform measures reshaped the management of alcohol in the Northern Territory. Positive outcomes shown in the early evaluations demonstrate we are on the right track with these changes and through strong, evidence-based policy, we can impact on the endemic alcohol issues causing harm across the Territory. This work must continue and evolve to make generational change in the Territory's relationship with alcohol.

AADANT is calling for:

- A commitment to retain and continue funding all alcohol reform measures introduced in response to the Riley Review through to completion of a thorough, independent evaluation process.
- A commitment to the implementation of all outstanding reform measures supported in the NT Government's response to the Riley Review.

3. Commitment to providing a health-first approach to AOD management including equitable access to harm minimisation strategies with a focus on demand and harm reduction approaches.

Under the [National Drug Strategy](#) there is recognition of the need for government to take a balanced approach to the three pillars of Harm Minimisation:

- demand reduction;
- supply reduction; and
- harm reduction.

Through the implementation of the Riley Review recommendations in the NT, we have seen considerable focus and policy development in supply reduction measures for alcohol. While this work has so far shown positive outcomes, maintaining and building on these gains requires a broad and balanced approach across all pillars of harm minimisation.

AADANT believes a review of the current policy and legislation directing the Northern Territory's harm minimisation strategy should be undertaken to align funding and actions with the most current evidence and international best practice models.

With regards to harm reduction, AADANT is calling for:

- Increased investment in drug and alcohol education delivery, health promotion and assertive outreach.

- Increased access to needle and syringe programs through the extension of the After Hours Dispensing Unit Program to ensure accessibility to sterile injecting equipment for all Territorians.
- Extension to access of naloxone products including support for take home naloxone and inclusion of naloxone as an essential item for Emergency First Responders.
- Increased access to Opioid Pharmacotherapy Programs (OPP) through investment in training of further medical professionals to administer the program including GPs and pharmacists.
- The introduction of drug checking (e.g., pill testing) services and support for enhanced harm reduction notification services.
- Funding for destigmatisation training for media outlets and promotion of professional standards for reporting of matters relating to alcohol and other drugs.

With regards to demand reduction, AADANT is calling for:

- Removal of barriers for those seeking treatment for their alcohol and other drug use including financial and logistical support to engage in treatment.
- Increased access to destigmatisation training for all frontline service workers who may have contact with people who use drugs.
- A focus on ensuring a health-focused response to problematic drug use including investigation into the development of a pre-arrest assessment and diversion program to enhance access to treatment services for clients at-risk of entering the criminal justice system.

4. Commitment to providing equitable access to medical Cannabis therapies for all Territorians.

Internationally and within Australia, medical Cannabis is increasingly recognised as a legitimate and viable medicine offering treatment for a range of conditions. Despite continuously increasing client demand for access to medical Cannabis, the NT has yet to see a single script fulfilled. Lack of legal pathways to accessing this medicine is resulting in the continued incarceration of individuals who are resorting to illegal pathways for access. All Territorians, including those living in regional and remote settings, should be provided with the most appropriate, effective, and preferred medications to suit their conditions. There is a significant social injustice in failing to provide this access while continuing to incarcerate individuals who have no other choice but to subvert the law to obtain medication.

AADANT is calling for a clear, concise plan for the development and implementation of the required training, policy changes and logistical investment required to provide equitable access to medical Cannabis therapies for all Territorians.