



MEDIA RELEASE

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Politicians urged to end Australia's alcohol and other drugs treatment crisis

Politicians are being urged to face facts about alcohol and other drug-related issues and commit to end the country's pressing treatment crisis, as 500,000 Australians miss out on the healthcare they need to overcome drug use disorders.

The Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs, the peak organisation for professionals in the alcohol and other drugs field, has written to all federal MPs and senators calling for them to support increased and more effective government investment in treatment services*.

APSAD Vice President and President-elect Professor Michael Farrell, who is Director of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, said fewer than half the people who need, would use and would benefit from treatment are currently able to access it.

"This is an indefensible situation that would not be tolerated for any other chronic, debilitating health condition that affects so many people from all walks and stages of life, in every electorate," Professor Farrell said.

"APSAD is calling on all parties, politicians and decision makers to commit to more and better investment in alcohol and other drug treatment services and support for people across Australia.

"People experiencing drug problems and their families deserve to know their political representatives will stand up for them and their fundamental rights to health and wellbeing.

"Unfortunately, the stigma of illicit drugs and the political focus on law-and-order measures clouds the realities of alcohol and other drug disorders as a health problem for which people need treatment, not criminalisation, punishment and marginalisation.

"No matter where they live or who they elect, Australians seeking help to overcome drug problems deserve affordable, accessible specialist treatment to help them recover their health and wellbeing.

"Politicians need to understand that treatment for drug use disorders works, with success rates comparable to other chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma, and with a similar likelihood of relapse.

"APSAD also stresses that the treatment of drug disorders is highly cost effective and delivers good value for money, returning \$7 for every \$1 invested. Treatment benefits not only the person but their family, their employer and their wider community.

"We should no longer tolerate the huge under-investment in specialist alcohol and other drugs treatment services that has created this current situation.

"People experiencing serious drug problems require specialist treatment; however, drug treatment services are at full capacity and there is a huge unmet need, particularly for free or low cost services.

"Under-resourced, over-stretched services also take a heavy toll on professionals caring for people with alcohol- and other drug-related problems, who are often frustrated they can't help more people or can only provide limited services because of funding restrictions," Professor Farrell said.

Many people with alcohol- and other drug-related problems are also dealing with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, PTSD or bipolar disorder, or medical problems including liver disease and chronic pain.

The top two drugs leading Australians to seek treatment are alcohol and amphetamines, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's most recent report¹.

Alcohol accounted for 34 per cent of all treatment episodes in 2017-18, while amphetamines accounted for 25 per cent. Demand for treatment for amphetamines, particularly methamphetamine, has more than doubled over the last 10 years.

Problems related to prescription and other opioids are also increasing in Australia. More than 50,000 people are receiving opioid substitution therapy with medications such as methadone or buprenorphine.

APSAD Policy Brief: *The pressing need for more and better investment in alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia is freely available at www.apsad.org.au/news-a-media/policy-briefs.

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¹ Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2019, *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2017-18*. www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol-other-drug-treatment-services/aodts-2017-18-key-findings/contents/summary

 References for facts/statements in this media release are contained in the APSAD Policy Brief