



Issues Paper #2

The role of the specialist alcohol and other drugs sector in responding to domestic and family violence

Background

In July 2020, the Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC) made submission to the parliamentary inquiry into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. This paper summarises that submission and AADC's perspective on the role an effective and well-resourced alcohol and other drugs sector can play in minimising harm related to domestic and family violence.


The relationship between alcohol and other drugs and domestic and family violence

- Domestic and family violence is a form of gendered violence caused by factors outside of alcohol and other drugs, however their use can increase the frequency and magnitude of violent events by people who use violence, and the levels of vulnerability of people who experience domestic and family violence.
- Whilst there is varied evidence regarding the effect that different drugs, including alcohol, have on the use of violence, population-based initiatives that reduce problematic levels of alcohol consumption are known to have beneficial effects on reducing all forms of violence, including domestic and family violence.
- People whose problematic use of alcohol and other drugs co-occurs with domestic and family violence have complex needs and require the support of specialist practitioners from each sector, working in collaborative partnership towards complementary goals.

Supporting family safety and wellbeing through effective and well-resourced services

- Given the impact of the problematic use of alcohol and other drugs on the frequency and magnitude of domestic and family violence, increasing access to specialist treatment support to reduce such usage is vital. Addressing the shortage of alcohol and other drugs treatment services highlighted in 2014's *New Horizons Report*, will directly contribute to reducing domestic and family violence-related harm.
- The alcohol and other drugs sector needs support to build the resources and skills required to work effectively with people who use domestic and family violence through non-collusive practice whilst supporting their therapeutic goals; reduce the barriers to treatment commonly experienced people who experience domestic and family violence and who are seeking help for alcohol and other drugs dependence; and, deliver interventions that reflect practice aligned with domestic and family violence needs and meet community expectations of safety.
- Both the alcohol and other drugs and the domestic and family violence sectors must be funded to develop cross-sector partnerships as a core component of service delivery. These should be designed to improve collaborative practice,





facilitate warm referrals across both service systems, and deliver joined-up and complementary services where domestic and family violence and the problematic use of alcohol and other drugs are co-occurring factors.

- Specific communities who require access to alcohol and other drugs treatment services, such as women with children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and members of the LGBTQI community, should have access to specialist services designed and delivered in accordance with their unique needs and circumstances.

Investing in the evidence to inform policy and program development

- People who use domestic and family violence may encourage dependence on alcohol and other drugs by people who experience domestic and family violence in order to exert more control over them, including sabotaging efforts to seek treatment for dependence on alcohol and other drugs. Substance use control is an often-overlooked form of coercive control which requires further study to understand its prevalence and consequences for the safety and wellbeing of people who experience domestic and family violence.
- Both people who use and people who experience domestic and family violence access specialist health services, including alcohol and other drugs treatment services; however, visibility of this cohort through effective data collection is poor. Collection and collation of comprehensive demographic data of clients whose case histories indicate domestic and family violence, via consistent national processes and mindful of the need to maintain privacy, will improve capacity for related policy and service planning and design.
- People who experience domestic and family violence may also use alcohol and other drugs to manage untreated or managed trauma. This requires a system that can interrupt the family violence, ensure the safety of people experiencing domestic and family violence, and deliver support for trauma and interventions that help reduce the use of alcohol and other drugs.

About us

The Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC) is the national peak body representing the alcohol and other drugs sector, comprising: specialist health services working to prevent and reduce harms which can be associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs; practitioners working in alcohol and other drugs treatment settings and the areas of prevention and early intervention; researchers and policy specialists dedicated to building the evidence-base to support robust and evidence-based practice and programs; and people who use or have used alcohol and other drugs, and their families.

Our purpose

We work to advance health and public welfare through achievement of the lowest possible levels of alcohol and other drug related harm by promoting effective, efficient and evidence-informed prevention, treatment and harm reduction policies, programs and research at the national level.

The issues paper series

AADC publishes periodical issues papers to promote the views and priorities of the specialist alcohol and other drugs sector.

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