



Media Release: ATODA and AADC Welcome Passing of Drug Decriminalisation Legislation

20 October 2022

The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) and the Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC) welcome the passing of the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Possession) Amendment Bill 2022 in the ACT Legislative Assembly today.

ATODA CEO, Dr Devin Bowles said: “This is a historic moment in the ACT. This legislation is clear evidence of the ACT Government’s commitment to responding to drug use as a health issue rather than a criminal issue. I also want to thank Mr Michael Pettersson MLA for moving his Private Members Bill and for being a vocal champion of the need to eliminate stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs.”

Dr Bowles said “The specialist alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector, along with many other stakeholders, have been involved in this debate for a long time in the ACT. The sector will continue to work closely with the ACT Government and the ACT community to ensure that this legislation achieves its intended goal of reducing drug-related harms, reducing stigma and supporting people who use drugs through the health system rather than the criminal justice system. We look forward to working constructively with the ACT Government and other stakeholders ahead of the Bill’s implementation in one year’s time. Once personal possession of the specified drugs is decriminalised, ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be critical to develop an Australian evidence base to also inform other jurisdictions’ legislative reform.”

The passing of this legislation follows the recent announcement from the ACT’s Minister for Health Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA of an additional \$13 million investment in alcohol and other drug treatment services in the ACT Government’s 2022-23 Budget. ATODA has warmly welcomed this investment.

Dr Bowles said, “Given the ACT Government’s recent increase in funding for the alcohol and other drug sector through the 2022-23 Budget, we are pleased that the Government has considered in tandem the need for legislative reform and investment in the alcohol and other drugs sector.”

Melanie Walker, CEO of the Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC), also noted that: “The passage of this legislation in the ACT has significant implications at the national level as a number of other jurisdictions continue to consider options for legislative reform in relation to the use of drugs. AADC also notes the recommendations of the ACT’s Select Committee on the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Bill 2021 in this context. The ACT Government has worked hard in partnership with key stakeholders to develop a comprehensive suite of measures designed to reduce drug related harm in the ACT, as evidenced by the initiatives outlined in its 2022-23 Budget. The ACT should be commended for leading the way in progressing practical, evidence-based policy, programs and legislation that provide a template for other jurisdictions to consider, adapt and follow.”

For more information or comment, please contact Dr Devin Bowles, CEO, ATODA on 0413 435 080 or Melanie Walker, CEO, AADC on 0438 430 963

The Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA)

ATODA is the peak body for the alcohol, tobacco and other drug sector in the ACT. Its purpose is to lead and influence positive outcomes in policy, practice and research by providing collaborative leadership for intersectoral action on the social determinants of harmful drug use, and on societal responses to drug use and to people who use drugs. ATODA's vision is a healthy, well and safe ACT community with the lowest possible levels of alcohol, tobacco and other drug related harms.

The Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC)

AADC is the national peak body representing the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector. We work to advance health and public welfare through the lowest possible levels of AOD related harm by promoting effective, efficient and evidence-informed prevention, treatment and harm reduction policies, programs and research at the national level. AADC's founding members comprise each state and territory peak body for the AOD sector (including ATODA), other national peak bodies relating to the AOD sector, and professional bodies for those working in the AOD sector.