



JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

URGENT ACTION NEEDED FOLLOWING NSW DRUG SUMMIT

The following joint statement is from the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Residential Rehabilitation Network (ADARRN), ACON, the NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), and Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies (NADA).

As organisations and leaders in alcohol and other drug (AOD) services and supporting communities, we call on the NSW Government to work with people with living/lived experience and the AOD sector to take urgent action following the NSW Drug Summit.

The multi-day summit heard from a range of people and organisations, including health experts, researchers, support workers and people with lived and living experiences, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, people from cultural and diverse communities on solutions to reduce drug related harm. We now call on the NSW Government to translate the discussions into meaningful action and systemic change.

The summit has shown there is an urgent need for the NSW Government to develop an evidence-based whole of government strategy on alcohol and other drugs.

The strategy needs to set clear goals to reduce drug-related harm with action and investment across prevention, early intervention, treatment and harm reduction. It needs to be co-designed with people from diverse communities.

In addition to the strategy, Summit participants prioritised:

- Immediate increased investment in services so that everyone looking for help can get an appropriate service in a timely manner. This included prevention, early intervention, treatment and harm reduction.
- Expanding and supporting the peer workforce, including the Aboriginal peer workforce.
- Support for harm reduction including the expansion of peer-led services, the introduction of drug checking services and allowing more supervised injecting facilities.
- Decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use and a reform of diversion programs
- Review of approaches to policing at festivals and immediate cessation of strip searches related to drug possession.
- Strategies to reduce the stigma faced by people who use drugs and their families.
- Improve cross-sector partnerships across health, justice and social services.
- Address barriers to accessing housing.

There were major concerns raised about culturally specific responses that achieve improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, young peoples and families, multicultural and LGBTQ+ communities. It is critical that there is active and meaningful involvement of all parts of the community as we move beyond this Summit, as well as creating cultural safety mechanisms for all services with accountability measures for implementation.

The government will not be able to achieve the gains that are needed by working alone. Success will come from a response marked by partnership and collaboration among government, non-government organisations, health services, researchers and people with lived or living experiences of alcohol or other drug use, their families and diverse communities.

We strongly urge the NSW Government to appoint a Taskforce to carry forward the recommendations of the summit and co-design a comprehensive NSW Strategy with representation from across the community and from people with lived and living experience.

As leaders of community-based services, we stand ready to work with government to make this happen.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES FROM ORGANISATION REPRESENTATIVES

Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Residential Rehabilitation Network (ADARRN) Chair Danielle Manton (Barunggam):

“Indigenous leadership is essential from the top and at every level across the sector – including in the Ministry, the Minister’s Office and service providers, with transparent accountability measures to the many First Nations communities in NSW privilege community expertise within the local context.”

Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA) CEO Dr Robert Stirling:

“The NSW Government does not need to wait for the Drug Summit report to be handed down to increase funding for existing NGO alcohol and other drug services to respond to the demand by NSW communities. People need to be able to access treatment and support when they need it. We urge the NSW Government to commit to funds in the next budget”

NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) CEO Dr Mary Harrod:

“If this Summit has shown us anything, it’s that the people of NSW are overwhelmingly frustrated with Government inaction on the issues that are urgently affecting their families and communities. We must act immediately to develop an inclusive and whole-of-government Drug Strategy and increase resources for a sector that has, because of stigma, been under-resourced for decades.”

ACON CEO Michael Woodhouse:

“Reducing drug related harm is a complex public health challenge that needs an evidence based, joint response from government, health services, law enforcement and most importantly people with lived experience. A strong partnership led by a joint Taskforce is the most effective way to achieve real gains in drug policy.”

ENDS

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