

PEAK BODY ISSUES PLEA TO NSW GOVERNMENT: “DON’T DROP THE BALL ON DRUG REFORM”

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NSW needs a funded, 10-year whole-of-government alcohol and other drug strategy, or the rates of drug-related death and harm will continue in the community.

That’s a key recommendation from the Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA), which is the peak body for the NGO alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector.

NADA represents 87 organisations which directly provide drug and alcohol related services in more than 100 locations across NSW.

NADA has released a new report responding to the 56 priorities put forward by the Co-Chairs of the 2024 NSW Drug Summit, ahead of the Government’s own response expected later this year.

NADA CEO, Dr Robert Stirling, said the NSW Government has an important opportunity to implement once-in-a-generation reform following the Drug Summit.

“We have a clear message for the NSW Government: Don’t drop the ball on drug reform,” Dr Stirling said.

“The 2024 Drug Summit was the second chance we needed after the former Government failed to implement key recommendations from the 2020 *Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug ‘Ice’*’.

“Our report today consolidates our sector’s response to the 56 priorities made by the Co-Chairs, so the NSW Government can expedite its response.

“We are hopeful for positive outcomes from the NSW Drug Summit, but the fate of reform lays in the hands of the NSW Government.”

In addition to a funded, 10-year strategy, the report calls for an additional \$65 million per year over five years for the non-government sector, with many organisations struggling to maintain services to respond to community need.

“After years of chronic underfunding, we are urging the NSW Government to act,” Dr Stirling said.

“While new services have been funded in areas of need within some regional and rural communities, demand for AOD services continues to increase across NSW.

“That’s why we’re calling for an additional \$65 million per year to boost the sector’s capacity to support those who need alcohol and other drug support services. This could be provided incrementally over five years to enable services to build a strong and capable workforce”

Leone Crayden, NADA Chair and CEO of AOD clinic The Buttery in the Northern Rivers, said the increasing demands on frontline providers is crippling.

"If it weren't for the generous donations from our sponsors, we wouldn't be able to provide a large portion of our services," Ms Crayden said.

"We haven't had an increase in funding beyond CPI for more than 10 years, but the cost of everything else has gone up significantly.

"We are treading water thanks to our sponsors, but that's not a sustainable business model.

"Our participants are presenting with more complex needs than we've ever seen before, including polysubstance abuse and complex mental health needs.

"We accept all of these participants, we don't turn anyone away. So that means we need a highly skilled workforce of counsellors, social workers, GPs and clinicians. And that costs money which we don't have.

"While we are encouraged by the Drug Summit and its subsequent report, we need a swift and comprehensive response from the NSW Government to give our sector confidence and stability."

The peak body's report also called for:

- **A 10-year whole-of-government AOD strategy to be delivered within 12 months.** The Government does not need extensive consultation as the sector has provided significant feedback to date. It does need to ensure that the views of Aboriginal, Multicultural and LGBTIQ+ communities are central to its development.
- **Boosting withdrawal services across NSW, particularly in rural and regional areas** to improve treatment access.
- The **re-establishment of a dedicated AOD workforce organisation** for the sector to address workforce challenges, including complex clinical demands and poor access to training, especially in regional NSW. This centre would provide high-quality sector-informed training, via a registered training organisation, to support workforce sustainability and build capacity of the AOD workforce and adjacent sectors, such as child protection, family and domestic violence, Police and other sectors who interact with people who use AOD.
- **Increasing the number and capacity of harm reduction, prevention and early intervention services**, ensuring they are designed and delivered by local communities, including Aboriginal, Multicultural and LGBTIQ+ communities.

"We look forward to engaging with Government on this report, and ensuring that the needs of our sector are front and centre as it prepares its response," Dr Stirling said.

For more information about NADA, and to read a copy of the report, visit www.nada.org.au

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About NADA

The Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA) is the peak organisation for non-government alcohol and other drugs services in NSW. We lead, strengthen and advocate for the sector. Our decisions and actions are informed by our members' experiences, knowledge, and concerns.

We represent 87 organisational members that provide services in over 100 locations across NSW, employing over 1,000 staff. Our members provide a broad range of alcohol and other drugs services, including health promotion and harm reduction, early intervention, treatment and continuing care programs.

For more information, please visit www.nada.org.au.