

MEDIA RELEASE

7 October 2020

[starts]

Federal Budget: Failure to meet AOD treatment needs ominous for the future

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) is gravely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on Victorians experiencing substance dependence and the lack of support offered in the Federal Budget.

There could have been a great opportunity for the Budget to complement the raft of support allocated to mental health through increased resourcing and support to address long standing capacity and access issues impacting alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment and harm reduction activity.

Mr. Sam Biondo, EO VAADA says, 'the allocations in this budget highlight a government focus on the implications of COVID-19 on mental health, while assuming that there has had no impact on AOD dependence. The anxieties relating to COVID-19 and the impact of recession will result in increased at risk AOD use and subsequent treatment demand going forward.'

Evidence indicates that:

- One in three Australian's drink daily, up from just over one in twenty;
- Seven in 10 people report drinking more alcohol; and
- Three in 10 people are drinking more alcohol in response to anxiety¹.

'These harmful patterns of alcohol consumption will add greater numbers to the thousands of Australians who are in need of, but cannot currently access AOD treatment as the system is overburdened. This is due to COVID-19 related service contractions across a number of service types.'

Pre-COVID-19, there were between 200,000 to 500,000 Australians unable to access treatment². A recent survey of Victorian agencies noted there are 2369 people waiting for treatment on any given day, many of whom will have been waiting for months.

In Victoria, 516 people fatally overdosed in 2019, with 4365 Victorians having fatally overdosed since 2010³.

'If we look to what we know about natural disasters and AOD use, it is evident that increased AOD use occurs not only during, but in the years following a crisis. For instance, following Black Saturday, alcohol use

¹ Fare 2020. Alcohol Sales and use during COVID-19. <http://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-POLL.pdf>;
NADK 2020. How often do Australians drink alcohol?. NCETA. <https://nadk.flinders.edu.au/kb/alcohol/consumption-patterns/frequency-consumption/how-often-do-australians-drink-alcohol/>

² National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (2014) New Horizons: The review of alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/new-horizons-review-alcohol-and-other-drug-treatment-services-australia>

³ Jamieson, A (2020, *Finding into the death of Wayne Marshall*, Coroners Court of Victoria, <https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/Finding%20-%20MARSHALL%20Wayne%20Laurence%20-%20COR2018%205754%20-%2024082020.pdf>

by people residing in affected areas was 1.4 times higher than other regions⁴. Similar findings were made following the Queensland floods, where those in flood-affected areas were 5.2 times more likely to increase alcohol consumption⁵.

‘Mental Health and AOD services equally address clients with trauma and anxiety generated through COVID-19, however the response for the 200,000 – 500,000 people unable to access AOD services the response has been inadequate. It is clear that in the months and years ahead this very large group will find it even harder to access AOD services they need.’

Targeted AOD spending to create capacity to meet increased demand and offset the access issues exacerbated by a COVID-19 contraction in service capacity should be provided.

[ends]

VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics 2016. The Economic Cost of the Social Impact of Natural Disasters.
<http://australianbusinessroundtable.com.au/assets/documents/Report%20-%20Social%20costs/Report%20-%20The%20economic%20cost%20of%20the%20social%20impact%20of%20natural%20disasters.pdf>

⁵ Turner et al 2013. Impact of the 2011 Queensland Floods on the use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Medication. 37 (4).