



Western Australian Network of
Alcohol & other Drug Agencies

Western Australian Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025

Consultative draft October 2019

WANADA Submission

About WANADA

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) is the peak body for the alcohol and other drug education, prevention, treatment and support sector in Western Australia. WANADA is an independent, membership-driven not-for-profit association.

WANADA is driven by the passion and hard work of its member organisations, which include community alcohol and other drug counselling; therapeutic communities; residential rehabilitation; intoxication management; harm reduction; peer based; prevention; and community development services.

WANADA's Position

WANADA is supportive of the *Western Australian Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025: Consultative draft October 2019's*:

- intent to link with other key national and state strategic documents and respond to the recommendations of the WA State Coroner's Inquest in the Kimberley and the Message Stick Inquiry; and
- recognition of the importance of implementing systems-based, whole-of-population approaches.

The draft Action Plan references the significant intersectionality of alcohol and other drug use and suicide.¹ It is essential that the draft Action Plan appropriately accounts for this linkage and captures how the specialist alcohol and other drug treatment sector contributes to suicide prevention, intervention, postvention and population-specific initiatives. WANADA is concerned that this level of detail is not accounted for in the current draft.

WANADA believes that the draft Action Plan does not provide the level of guidance that can be expected from an Action Plan and appears more as a high-level strategic framework. The absence of detail may constrain systemic sector planning and service awareness. An implementation strategy will be essential to address these limitations.

WANADA is concerned that the timeframe for feedback on the draft Action Plan is too limited to support alcohol and other drug specialist sector input. Comprehensive consultation with the specialist alcohol and other drug service sector is essential to support implementation design, and to ensure the sector's role in suicide prevention, and other initiatives, is fully captured.

Alcohol and other drug considerations within the context of suicide prevention

It is important that the draft Action Plan clearly recognises the roles, responsibilities and potential opportunities across relevant sectors. Addressing the range of risk factors identified in the Draft Action Plan requires a systemic cross-sector approach, including the need to address significant underlying elements.

¹ The draft Action Plan states problems related to alcohol and other drug use were present in 29.4% of deaths by suicide in Australia in 2018.

Stigma

Illicit drug dependence is the most stigmatised social health condition in the world; alcohol dependence is rated fourth.² Alcohol and other drug-related stigma:

- impedes help seeking behaviour;
- influences funding decisions;
- causes profound isolation; and
- results in discriminatory practices that inhibit access to health and human services.³

WANADA agrees that addressing the stigma associated with mental health and suicide must be a priority response. Given the intersectionality of these issues, addressing alcohol and other drug related stigma must occur in parallel, to reduce suicide risks factors.

Community Development

The specialist alcohol and other drug service sector undertakes community development across the State to:

- improve inclusion and connectedness;
- increase social protective factors;
- build awareness of health and wellbeing issues;
- enhance awareness of available services; and
- grow community resilience.

The community development undertaken by the specialist alcohol and other drug sector is diverse, encompassing education, harm reduction, awareness, prevention, and health and wellbeing activities. These initiatives, particularly in the regions, are/need to be community driven and appropriately localised to best meet local community needs.

It is essential that these community development activities are fully supported, and their contributions to suicide prevention recognised. The benefit of local, community driven initiatives, as opposed to universal State-wide campaigns, must also be acknowledged.

Assessment, service capacity, referral and coordinated care

Specialist alcohol and other drug services report that suicidality is regularly identified as a significant co-occurring issue for people presenting for treatment and support. Services actively manage these risks, appropriately respond (within their capacity to do so effectively), refer and/or coordinate care with other specialist services where available.

For people presenting to specialist alcohol and other drug services with suicidality, actions for consideration in the draft Action Plan should include:

- development of an improved understanding of the rates and severity of suicidality for people presenting to specialist alcohol and other drug services;
- support for cross-sector services' capacity building to effectively respond to co-occurring suicidality and alcohol and other drug associated harms, including crisis management, referral and care coordination;
- investment in service expansion, to ensure the availability of appropriate specialist services in all regions of Western Australia; and
- supporting service worker wellbeing, particularly for vicarious trauma and postvention.

WANADA recommends:

1. The draft Action Plan is expanded upon to provide comprehensive mapped detail and guidance regarding actions, roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
2. Comprehensive consultation is undertaken with the specialist alcohol and other drug service sector to inform implementation.
3. Specific actions are developed that reflect the intersectionality of suicide and alcohol and other drug associated harms.

² Kelly, J F & Westerhoff, C M (2010) Does it matter how we refer to individuals with substance-related conditions? A randomized study of two commonly used terms, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 202–207.

³ Global Commission on Drug Policy (2017) *The World Drug Perception Problem, Countering Prejudices about people who use drugs* <http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/reports/changing-perceptions/> Accessed 17/12/18