

MEDIA RELEASE

Alcohol and drugs services under threat with federal government failure to guarantee \$8m 'Ice Strategy' funding for WA

March 2022: Australia's alcohol and other drug services, already facing challenges and increasing demand due to COVID19, have been left in limbo by the Federal Government's failure to guarantee \$8 million in annual funding for Western Australia.

The National Ice Action Strategy (NIAS) provides over \$60M each year for national alcohol and other drug treatment and support services, of which almost \$8M is invested in WA. This funding represents about half of the Commonwealth government's total investment in mainstream alcohol and other drug services in WA.

"We are extremely concerned that the Federal Government has not provided any certainty as to whether half their investment in alcohol and other drug treatment services will continue beyond June 2022", says Jill Rundle, CEO WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA).

"This uncertainty and the potential reduction in funding is already impacting our services, at a time when we are experiencing immense strain and increased service demand as a result of the pandemic", says Ms Rundle. "We risk having to reduce services at a time when people need them the most."

In 2019-20 about 20,000 people in WA received treatment from government funded alcohol and other drug services. Since then, impacted by the pandemic, services have been reporting increased demand, and individuals have been presenting with increased health and wellbeing concerns.

The potential loss of funding is of concern across the state for services such as Palmerston.

"Since the start of the pandemic we've seen more people presenting with problems related to alcohol use, increases in anxiety and depression and an increase in the incidence of family and domestic violence," says Palmerston CEO Emma Jarvis. "Providers are booked up months in advance and increased mental health presentations are placing significant strain on allied health services."

"The community needs to know that critical services are available," says Ms Jarvis. "As restrictions lift, our expectation based on experience is that methamphetamine will become more available, leading to increased use. Families and friends are concerned about timely access to services. Funding will be crucial for education, harm reduction, counselling and family support."

This is a national concern, and WANADA joins other state and territory peaks and the Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council (AADC) as the national peak body in urging the government to work with the sector to ensure continuity of service through confirmation of funding.

WANADA is the peak body for the alcohol and other drug sector and represents over 100 member services throughout Western Australia that provide prevention, treatment and support in the community.

Anyone wanting information, treatment or support related to their own or another person's alcohol or other drug use is encouraged to contact the Alcohol and Drug Support Service on (08) 9442 5000 / 1800 198 024. The service is free, confidential and available 24/7.

Sector representatives are available for interview.

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