



Western Australian Network of
Alcohol & other Drug Agencies

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Alcohol and other drug sector needs greater input into proposed welfare reform

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) says the Federal Government needs to work with the alcohol and other drug sector if new welfare reform is to result in better outcomes for people affected by alcohol and other drug-related issues.

The Federal Budget 2017-18 includes changes that could see thousands of people eligible for Centrelink payments referred to alcohol and other drug treatment services.

“We know that Western Australia's alcohol and other drug treatment services are already struggling to meet demand,” says WANADA CEO Jill Rundle. “Coercing people to attend treatment at the risk of losing their source of income will likely result in the displacement of people who access treatment voluntarily.”

“The sector needs to have the capacity to address these needs and continue to achieve positive outcomes for the community.”

WANADA Board member and Palmerston Association CEO Sheila McHale says the alcohol and other drug sector needs to be consulted if the reform is to benefit the community.

“The WA alcohol and other drug sector is in the best position to understand the complex issues at play and how best to address them,” said Ms McHale. “We need to be consulted if these measures have any hope of supporting the individuals, families and communities most affected by alcohol and other drug use in our state.”

The new reform comes into effect from 1 July 2017. The government will not allow welfare recipients to be exempt from mutual obligation requirements solely due to alcohol or other drug use from 1 January 2018. Approximately 11,000 exemptions are estimated to be affected.

“The alcohol and other drug service sector isn't ready to incorporate these changes,” says Ms Rundle. “There are so many questions that need answering in relation to the new reform and it's impact for services and for consumers.”

WANADA believes that the proposed reform will discriminate against Western Australia's most vulnerable people, without solid evidence that it will improve their health and wellbeing.

Says Ms Rundle, “We need an assurance that the Federal Government will work closely with the alcohol and other drug sector in Western Australia to ensure that consumers and services are not disadvantaged. Without amendments to build service capacity and address the negative impact of stigma, this reform is likely to result in increased social costs in the long run.”

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