

# Alcohol and Drug Foundation feedback: Our Healthcare Future consultation

12 February 2021

## About the Alcohol and Drug Foundation

Founded in 1959, the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) has contributed 60 years of service to communities across Australia. The ADF works in partnerships with communities to reduce the burden of disease caused by alcohol and other drug problems. The ADF's focus is on prevention and early intervention. Our strategies include community action, health promotion, education, information, policy, advocacy, and research.

## Response to the consultation paper

The ADF strongly supports the Department's recognition of the importance of preventative health in the Our Healthcare Future Immediate Actions and Consultation Paper. As highlighted in the Paper, pressure on one part of the healthcare system affects all other parts of the system. As such, preventing problems in the first instance can alleviate pressure down the entire chain of healthcare services. The ADF further commends the Paper's commitment to sustainability for healthcare in Tasmania. Increasing investment in prevention, including the prevention of alcohol and other drug (AOD) uptake and associated harms, is a key element of ensuring that sustainability that additionally provides a range of benefits across generations.

The longer AOD use is delayed, the better the long-term outcomes for individuals and their community. Pressure is reduced on AOD and mental health treatment sectors, hospitals, general practitioners, the education sector, and the criminal justice system as more Australians fulfil their social and economic potential with their lives unlimited by alcohol and other drug harm.

The AIHW reports that disease expenditure is approximately \$117 billion per annum across the three tiers of government; that around 50 per cent is spent on chronic conditions. In contrast, AIHW reports that Australia spends around \$2 billion on prevention each year - less than two per cent of the total public health budget. The Consultation Paper notes that there is a growing demand for, and subsequent increased spending on, healthcare provision in Tasmania.

Increasing investment and focus on prevention activities that seek to address the social determinants of health is critical to managing this burden of demand and cost in the long term. Key social determinants are socio-economic position; early life experiences; social exclusion; social capital; employment; housing; and the residential environment (AIHW, Australia's Health 2016). The social determinants of health have a complex and dynamic relationship with the development of AOD and mental health needs, as well as overall physical health and wellbeing.

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In the context of AOD-related issues, primary prevention strategies aim to shift the focus 'upstream' by helping people to avoid, reduce or modify drug use; rather than reacting to a subsequent 'downstream' problem that requires acute treatment, and often an emergency response.

For example, supporting people to avoid early or heavy alcohol and other drug use can help reduce personal and social dysfunction, mental and physical health problems, and the need for complex interventions through the health, legal and justice systems. By strengthening and supporting personal and social protective factors the likelihood that people, particularly young people, will engage in problematic AOD use is reduced, thus promoting mental and physical health and improving their life chances.

Primary prevention activities actively led by the community in which they are undertaken, such as the ADF's Local Drug Action Teams, are a proven method of reducing alcohol and drug problems. They draw on community infrastructure and the power of the local people to strengthen the factors that protect youth and adults from AOD harm. They enlist evidence-based approaches and are adapted to meet the needs of specific communities.

Other prevention-focused initiatives, such as the ADF's Good Sports program, focus both on individual and peer protective factors such as attitudes, knowledge and connection as well as societal protective factors such as building healthy culture and norms, awareness and reduction of stigma, and establishing expectations through policies and plans.

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation looks forward to continuing to deliver its Local Drug Action Teams and Good Sports programs in Tasmania as our contribution and commitment to preventing and reducing the harms from AOD, improving the overall health and wellbeing of the community, and reducing the pressures placed on the healthcare system now and into the future.