

## Media Release

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### DEMAND FOR AOD SERVICES IN CANBERRA ON THE RISE

Directions Health Services commends the ACT Government on the broad ranging initiatives foreshadowed in the ACT Drug Action Plan 2018-2021 and hopes this will result in improved access to community-based treatment for the increasing number of Canberrans seeking help.

Demand for alcohol and other drugs (AOD) Treatment and Support Services (TSS) provided in the ACT by Directions Health Services continues to grow, and in 2017-18 exceeded capacity.

Directions Health Services annual report shows a 15 per cent increase in TSS clients accessing its services for the first time, or returning after a break.

“Our TSS services, funded by ACT Health, offer clients at all stages of change a range of harm minimisation-based interventions, therapeutic treatment and supports,” Directions Health Services CEO, Bronwyn Hendry explained.

“We are pleased Canberrans are reaching out for help, however, we must ensure services can keep pace with demand - we need to be able to provide services at the time people contact us. The impact on individuals and families if we can’t provide timely support can be devastating, and is a missed opportunity to improve the wellbeing of our community.”

“During 2017-18, over 1100 new clients sought treatment and support from Directions Health Services. However, there is still significant unmet need in our community.”

Less than half the people who need treatment for a substance use disorder seek treatment, and in the case of alcohol, only around a quarter of the people who have an alcohol problem seek treatment.

“In order to address this continued growth in Canberrans seeking treatment and support, we have redesigned TSS and implemented a new model of care, including revised triage, intake and assessment processes to offer a stepped care approach with a focus on treatment matching,” Ms Hendry said.

“The result has been better treatment matching and more timely brief interventions. In the face of this increased demand, we have worked hard to stabilise wait times for assessment, counselling and case management. We continue to offer same day walk-in and crisis support for those people needing more urgent support.”

“We have also increased our group services and take-up has been very positive.”

Directions Health Services welcomes the release today of the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan, particularly its focus on demand and harm reduction.

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“Overdose deaths are tragic and preventable. We have been calling for additional measures to reduce fatal overdoses in our community. We support establishment of a medically supervised drug consumption facility, expanding access to naloxone and pill testing as each of these initiatives have the potential to save lives” Ms Hendry said.

Canberrans impacted by alcohol and other drugs can struggle to access health care services, yet often experience the highest burden of disease.

“The commitment to improve pathways between AOD services and primary care is important. We would particularly like to see initiatives which deliver services where they are needed rather than rely on traditional settings,” Ms Hendry said.

“Demand for AOD services in the ACT is increasing, making it vital for funding of services to not only continue over the life of the Action Plan, but increase in line with the growing number of Canberrans reaching out for support.

“We encourage anyone in the ACT seeking to reduce their substance use and improve their personal health to contact a local service – we also want them to be assured that we will be there to help them.”

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