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# ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022-26

MHCC ACT Submission

Mental Health Community Coalition ACT

Peak Body for the ACT Community Mental Health Sector

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## About MHCC ACT

The Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT (MHCC ACT) is a membership-based organisation which was established in 2004 as a peak agency. It provides vital advocacy, representational and capacity building roles for the Not for Profit (NFP) community-managed mental health sector in the ACT.

This sector covers the range of non-government organisations (NGO) that offer recovery, early intervention, prevention, health promotion and community support services for people with a mental illness.

The MHCC ACT vision is to be the voice for quality mental health services shaped by lived experience. Our purpose is to foster the capacity of the ACT community-managed mental health services to support people to live a meaningful and dignified life.

Our strategic goals are:

- To support providers to deliver quality, sustainable, recovery-oriented services
- To represent our members and provide advice that is valued and respected
- To showcase the role of community-managed services in supporting peoples' recovery
- To ensure MHCC ACT is well governed, ethical and has good employment practices.

MHCC ACT currently has 43 organisational members.

## Introduction

MHCC ACT welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022-26.

MHCC ACT supports the principle of harm minimisation and commends the ACT Government for its demonstrated commitment to approaching drug use as primarily a health issue, adopting evidence-based policies and minimising the involvement of the justice system as much as possible.

MHCC ACT also commends the government for its associated commitments to eliminating stigma and discrimination against people who interact with Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs services and to recognise the invaluable contribution of lived experience and the peer workforce to this sector.

The recognition in the Action Plan of the importance of the non-governmental sector and of the effective collaboration and integration supporting the provision of AOD services in the ACT is noted and reiterated.

This submission is focused on those elements of the Action Plan that relate to the interaction between the AOD sector and the wider community-managed mental health sector.

For the remainder of the Action Plan, MHCC ACT defers to the expertise of the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Association of the ACT (ATODA) and offers broad support for the submission that ATODA has prepared.

## Priority Areas and Objectives

### Strengthening supports for people with co-occurring and complex needs

MHCC ACT supports the following objectives and endorses the ACT Government's vision of integration between mental health and the AOD sector as articulated in the Minister Davison's statement to the Legislative Assembly regarding integration on 4 May 2022:

- *Improved support for people with complex needs or needing access to multiple services*
- *Improved collaboration, co-ordination, and co-operation between AOD and other health services*

While we support efforts to strengthen coordination and collaboration across services systems, it is critical community-managed mental health services are engaged in this process alongside AOD and other relevant services sectors. Important considerations need to guide this work, including an understanding of potential differences in organisational and workforce risk appetite, workforce capacity building needs, policies and system philosophies between AOD and mental health, and resourcing constraints.

Building and strengthening interagency relationships, coordinated pathways of care, and care coordination is necessary to ensure more seamless and coordinated supports for people with co-occurring issues, but if this is to be achieved and sustained it needs to be properly resourced and backed-up by ongoing funding and relevant infrastructure.

Further consideration also needs to be given to improving vertical coordination and collaboration between services systems – for example, between public AOD or mental health services and community-managed services.

MHCC ACT looks forward to working collaboratively with our members, government, ATODA and other key stakeholders to strengthen supports for people with co-occurring and complex needs. We reiterate ATODA's call for government resourcing and the adoption of a comprehensive systems approach:

- *Explore opportunities for greater co-ordination and collaboration across government, NGOs and people with lived experience to address the needs of people with co-occurring issues or complex needs, including: AOD use and mental health, suicide, family and domestic violence, homelessness, unemployment, and gambling harm.*
- *Support the establishment of a formal network for mental health and AOD service sector workers.*
- *Establish a multidisciplinary service to support young people who have mental health needs co-occurring with trauma, disability and/or drug and alcohol use.*
- *Support initiatives to integrate mental health activity with alcohol and other drug initiatives for example through the Watson Precinct re-development project and the Commissioning Health Services in the Community project.*

### Valuing peer support workers and people with lived experience

MHCC ACT supports the inclusion of people with lived experience in all aspects of treatment and care across the entire mental health sector. We therefore support these objectives and initiatives, and will provide any practical support that may be appropriate.

In addition to supporting the objectives and actions outlined in the draft Action Plan, we believe it is vital people with lived experience of co-occurring mental health and AOD issues are

engaged in policy and program development and implementation across *both* the AOD and mental health services sectors. Specifically:

- *Ensure people with lived experience of ATOD and mental health issues are heard and their experiences are reflected in policy and program development*
- *Strengthened provision of peer support initiatives in ATOD treatment and mental health support services*
- *Identify options to better engage with people with lived experience of co-occurring mental health and AOD issues in policy and program development.*
- *Support the establishment of a formal ACT AOD peer worker network.*
- *Explore opportunities to build and strengthen relationships between the AOD and mental health lived experience workforce.*
- *Explore potential pathways to formal qualifications for AOD and mental health Peer Support Work.*
- *Explore options to extend peer treatment, support and advocacy services.*

We note the ACT Mental Health Workforce Strategy has recently been released, with an associated implementation plan to be developed. Expanding and strengthening the lived experienced workforce is a key pillar of this strategy, and we believe this offers scope to explore avenues to build and strengthen connections between lived experience workers in both the AOD and mental health sectors – whether they are working within the public or community-managed services systems.

It is also important consideration is given to building a lived experience workforce that reflects the intersectional nature of both AOD and mental health issues, taking into account issues such as age, cultural diversity, disability, and gender/sexual diversity. For example, there is substantial scope to build a lived experience workforce of older people who are able to work with the growing cohort of older people with both severe and complex mental health and AOD issues.

Finally, in developing policy and programs to support and strengthen the role of people with lived experience, we recommend that consideration be given to the National Mental Health Commission's [Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines](#), which were developed with input from people with AOD issues, as well as those with lived experience of mental ill health, hearing voices, homelessness, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

### **Governance: Community of Practice**

To achieve the objectives outlined in the Action Plan – particularly in relation to strengthening supports for people with co-occurring and complex needs – it is essential stakeholders are engaged across relevant sectors, including community-managed mental health services.

Community-managed mental health services sector representation should be reflected in both the Implementation Working Group, as well as the Action Plan Community of Practice.

MHCC ACT supports the creation of an Action Plan Community of Practice and is currently engaged in discussions around this with both Government and other peak bodies. We note, however, that our sector is not consistently engaged in relevant AOD policy planning processes, for example in recent commissioning processes. We look forward to working with the Government and other sector peaks and stakeholders to strengthen these processes and ensure sound governance mechanisms underpin the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan.