

Natasha Stott Despoja AO

Royal Commissioner

Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

By email

31/07/2024

Dear Commissioner Stott Despoja

I write to you as the Executive Officer of the South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services, the peak body for organisations who deliver early intervention, prevention, education, treatment and support services to South Australians on issues relating to alcohol and other drug use. These forty or more organisations include large organisations delivering a range of services (including alcohol and other drug and domestic and family violence services), specialist alcohol and drug services, Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations delivering AOD and a range of other services, and specialist AOD services.

The drug and alcohol sector wishes to raise a number of concerns raised by the Issues Paper:

- The Paper is silent on the nexus between alcohol and other drug use and domestic, family and sexual violence. Whilst we acknowledge the Paper is a brief overview canvassing key issues, there is copious research that shows whilst the use of alcohol and other drugs can never be seen as a justification or mitigating factor in dealing with domestic, family and sexual violence there are very strong correlation as reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024)¹:
 - o The Alcohol/Drug-Involved Family Violence in Australia (ADIVA) project (see Box 1) surveyed around 5,100 Australian residents aged 18 years and older and found:
 - o alcohol was involved (consumed by the respondent and/or other person) in around 1 in 3 (34%) incidents of intimate partner violence and 29% of family violence incidents
 - o drugs were consumed by someone involved in the incident in 1 in 8 (13%) incidents of intimate partner violence and 12% of family violence incidents
 - o intimate partner violence incidents involving alcohol or drug use were more likely to result in a physical injury than incidents that did not involve alcohol or drug use:
 - o 34% of alcohol-related intimate partner violence incidents resulted in physical injury, compared with 20% of incidents that were not alcohol-related
 - o 43% of drug-related intimate partner violence incidents resulted in physical injury, compared with 22% of incidents that were not drug-related (Miller et al. 2016)
 - o Drug involvement was significantly more likely (1.65 times more likely) in family and domestic violence incidents than other violent incidents and was associated with significantly greater self-reported negative life impact (Coomber et al. 2019).
- The AOD sector is keenly aware of the co-occurrence of domestic, family and sexual violence and the shared clients between the two sectors. SANDAS members support the development of a more comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing family and domestic violence (FDV) across the broader welfare system. This includes an increased focus on prevention and the interrelationship between sectors such as alcohol and other drugs (AOD), child and family welfare, child protection and domestic, family and sexual violence. To effect the necessary changes a number of national and state policies related to the protection and wellbeing of children and the support provided to their families require revision.
- This is fully explored in resources produced by the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction. These resources explore the relationship between AOD and FDV, with a focus on identifying how the AOD sector can better support clients who have co-occurring AOD and FDV issues, and minimise associated harms experienced by their children².
- In the context of the AOD sector this would include but not be limited to:

¹ **Factors associated with FDSV** Topic last updated: 19 Jul 2024, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/understanding-fdsv/factors-associated-with-fdsv#:~:text=34%25%20of%20alcohol%2Drelated%20intimate,2016>

² White, M., Roche, AM., Long, C., Nicholas, R., Gruenert, S. & Battams, S. (2013). *Can I Ask...? An alcohol and other drug clinician's guide to addressing family and domestic violence.*

Nicholas, R., White, M., Roche, AM., Gruenert, S. & Lee, N. (2012). *Breaking the Silence: Addressing family and domestic violence problems in alcohol and other drug treatment practice in Australia.*

National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA). Flinders University, Adelaide, SA.

- the provision of sufficient AOD treatment and support services to meet community need. Current sector capacity currently runs at about one third of community need as highlighted by Ritter et al³.
- addressing the impact of online ordering and home delivery of alcohol which is driving significant increased consumption and is associated with higher rates of domestic, family and sexual violence. A recent campaign by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) notes that 'Alcohol is involved in **between 23% and 65% of all police-reported family violence** incidents. When perpetrators are drinking, it also increases the severity of violence, leading to higher rates of harm and injury. Australian evidence shows greater access to alcohol increases the risk of violence – and the largely unregulated explosion in online sales and delivery has only added fuel to the fire.'⁴ Addressing these issues requires consideration of liquor licencing laws that enable excess consumption in the home. There are also issues that arise in the poor management of licenced premises resulting in people being served beyond legal levels of intoxication.
- There are also issues related to intoxication and suicidal ideation (including the commission of murder suicides).
- There are also links which need to be explored between the use of alcohol and other drugs, mental health issues and domestic, family and sexual violence. The Royal Commission could undertake enquiries into how to improve the integration of these services starting with addressing the discordant and unplanned commission that occurs because of the multiple government departments that act independently when planning and commissioning services across s these closely related sectors.
- In Alcohol's harm to others in 2021: Who bears the burden?, Laslett et al (2021) found that 'More than one-third of Australian adults appear to have been negatively affected by others' drinking in 2021, with women, younger people and heavier drinkers at greater risk. Substantial harm appears to be more likely to arise from the drinking of people Australians know than from strangers' drinking'⁵.
- In more detailed research on the 2016 NHDS Willoughby et al(2021) found, 'Alcohol-related family violence was significantly more prevalent amongst respondents in a range of socio-demographic categories. Identification of these groups which are adversely affected by the drinking of family and partners can aid in informing current policy to protect those more vulnerable'⁶.

This brief overview touches on several significant issues which we hope that the Royal Commission may choose to explore. SANDAS staff, members of our Board and representatives of our member organisations would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Commission and discuss these issues further.

Please do not hesitate to contact Michael White, Executive Officer [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for further information or to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Michael White
Executive Officer



SANDAS is the Peak Body representing non-government organisations delivering services in the Alcohol and other Drugs field in South Australia.

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³ Ritter A, Chalmers J, Gomez M. Measuring Unmet Demand for Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment: The Application of an Australian Population-Based Planning Model. J Stud Alcohol Drugs Suppl. 2019 Jan; Sup 18(18):42-50. doi: 10.15288/jsads.2019.s18.42. PMID: 30681948; PMCID: PMC6377016.

⁴ <https://fare.org.au/alcohol-and-gendered-violence/>

⁵ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/add.16205>

⁶ Willoughby, B., Jiang, H., Anderson-Luxford, D., & Laslett, A.-M. (2021). Alcohol-related family violence in Australia: Secondary data analysis of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey. International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research, 9(2), 69-74. <https://doi.org/10.7895/ijadr.343>