



## AOD eNews <March 2025>

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### 1. Central and Eastern Sydney PHN

**Author: Paul Hardy, Drug Health Manager**  
*Update from CESPHN*

Welcome to the first edition of CESPHN's AOD e News for 2025.

As we move into March we're excited to see the launch of the first pill testing trial in NSW, at the Yours and Owls festival in Wollongong across the first weekend in March. This is a really positive harm reduction step, proven in many other countries to save lives, and we hope that this is the beginning of more evidence based policy in the AOD space.

The first weekend in March also marks the Mardi Gras 2025 parade. The Festival theme for this year **"Free to Be"** is a celebration of the strides toward true LGBTQIA+ equality while also acting as a global reminder that our fight is far from over, and that we are not truly free until we are all free to be.

The second weekend in March marks International Women's Day, with the theme for 2025 of Accelerate Action towards a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination that's diverse, equitable, and inclusive where difference is valued and celebrated is a goal that will benefit everyone.

## 2. Community Restorative Centre

*Author: <David Chivers (AOD Transition Programs Manager) summarising original article by Alison Churchill (CEO), Angus Mason (ARPU Research Officer) and Dr Rory Gillard (ARPU Manager)>*

*<Beyond the Drug Summit: CRC's Call for Fair and Inclusive AOD Reform>*

### **What CRC Advocated for at the Drug Summit**

CRC championed better AOD legislation, policy, and practice for incarcerated people. We pushed for the removal of discriminatory barriers limiting their access to AOD services.

### **Gaps in the Drug Summit Consultation**

CRC welcomed the opportunity to attend but was disappointed by the exclusion of minoritised communities. First Nations people, despite making up 25% of AOD service users and over 40% of the NSW prison population, were overlooked. Trans and gender diverse people, those with lived experience, and culturally diverse communities were also neglected. Attendees had to demand inclusion in decision-making.

Incarcerated people were largely ignored, with little focus on AOD support and harm reduction in prisons. Discriminatory practices continue to block formerly incarcerated people from accessing community treatment.

### **Little Has Changed Since the Last NSW Drug Summit**

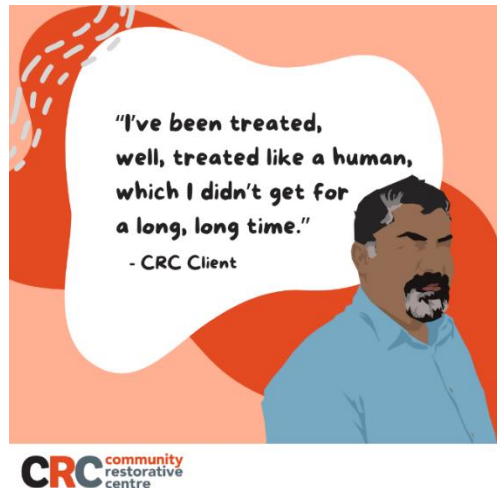
AOD policy discussions at the 2024 Drug Summit mirrored those from 1999 and the 2018 Ice Inquiry. Governments must act to treat drug use as a health issue, not a legal one.

CRC urges the NSW Government to:

- Act on the joint call from NUAA, ACON, NADA, and ADARRN to appoint a taskforce to implement Summit recommendations and co-design a NSW AOD Strategy with lived-experience representation.
- Ensure priority populations in the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 are meaningfully included in AOD policy consultation
- Provide equivalent access to AOD treatment in prisons as in the community
- Decriminalise personal drug possession in NSW
- Increase funding for evidence-based AOD services inclusive of formerly incarcerated people.
- Expand safe injecting rooms where needed
- Ditch drug dogs
- Ensure access to free drug-checking services in NSW.

As a leading organisation supporting people at the intersection of AOD dependence and the carceral system, CRC stands ready to work with the government to implement these urgent reforms.

Read the full article [here](#).



### 3. The Station Ltd. Drop-in Centre

*Author: <Mathew Morrow, Acting Operations Manager>  
<The Station Ltd. Drop-in Centre>*

The Station is a small 'drop-in' service that is walking distance from Wynard station. We operate seven days a week from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm Monday to Friday and Sat & Sun from 7:30 am to 2:00 pm.

We provide breakfast and lunch every day, as well as showers, laundry facilities, tea & coffee, computers, Wi-Fi, Foxtel, and a relaxing atmosphere. We have a team of housing support workers who provide housing support, this includes, but is not limited to; advocacy, housing applications, co-ordination with 'Homes' and guidance around the private rental market. As well as referrals to other crucial services, such as Dental Care referrals.

During the holiday period, we had our annual Christmas lunch on Friday 20th of December. We had over 100 guests attending for food that day. It was a great day, enjoyed by staff and guests alike! We received fabulous donations from The Rotary Club Darling Harbor, Transport NSW, Market City Shopping Centre, who also provided hampers and gifts that were provided to guests as well as ham and roast lunches.

Since our last newsletter, the former CEO Graciela Luna, who had been with the station for 25 years, has recently retired. Graciela was always dedicated to creating a safe and supportive environment for the people she supported whilst at The Station. She has made an incredible impact on the local community. Her kindness, empathy, and resilience will be deeply missed by both the team and the many lives she has touched over the years. Graciela's last day was on 31/01/2025 and The Station wishes her all the best in her new chapter in life. Since she has left myself, Mathew Morrow, has stepped in as the Acting Operations Manager and can be contacted on [mathew@thestationltd.org](mailto:mathew@thestationltd.org)

We also have Tara who has stepped into a full-time position. Tara has been helping on the front desk and can provide drug and alcohol referrals and has done a great job in the new position.

We are continuing with our partnership with Homeless Health, who come down every Wednesday between 08.00 am-10.00 am. The medical team includes a GP, a registered nurse, mental health clinician, and a psychiatrist who provides assessments, diagnosis, treatment-care, observation, health evaluation and professional advice. Also, every fortnight we have Homeless Persons' Legal Services attend to provide support to The Station.

We are currently looking at creating more partnerships and hope to set up regular weekly activities at the service. We are also hoping to have drug and alcohol case workers provide regular drop ins at the service to provide additional AOD support.

We will resume our regular activities of Bingo on Tuesday 25th of February at 10.00am – 11.00am. With prizes for those involved and snacks and small food provided.

Please feel free to reach out on (02) 9299 2252 or [dropin@thestationltd.org](mailto:dropin@thestationltd.org) or come down to 82 Erskine Street, Sydney.



#### 4. Kirketon Road Centre

**Author:** <Julie Dubuc, Counselling Unit Manager / KRC>  
<Kirketon Road Centre (South Eastern Sydney Local Health District)>

We successfully participated in the pilot for the AOD Clinical Care Standards, which are currently being rolled out.

Our team is running Addiction Specialist and Psychiatry Registrar clinics to provide specialised support for our clients.

We are exploring innovative approaches to address Chem Sex, referring to ACON's Chem Sex program and leveraging our own Sexual Health Services to support individuals engaging in sexualized drug use, which remains a significant issue.

There are now more clients on Buprenorphine than on Methadone, and we are working on partnerships to improve care for those who face challenges adhering to traditional treatment models and maintaining engagement.

We are currently conducting point-of-care Hepatitis C testing while also supporting clients with harm reduction strategies and ongoing testing. Additionally, we provide Nicotine replacement therapy and Naloxone to aid in harm reduction efforts.

The counselling service at Sutherland continues to operate at full capacity, receiving consistent referrals. Statistics from this service, compared to Kings Cross, indicate an older client cohort, with heroin as the most commonly used drug, followed by methamphetamines. There has also been an increase in needle and syringe program (NSP) usage in the Sutherland area, including home delivery services.



## 5. Oasis Youth Sydney

**Author:** <Sophie Branch, Psychologist, Oasis Youth Sydney>  
<ACE-Flex Cognitive Remediation Program at Oasis Youth Sydney>

Several lines of evidence have established the link between early life adversity and executive dysfunction (Malarbi et al., 2017; Op den Kelder et al., 2018). Disruptions to the formation of neural networks during critical periods of development has severe implications for cognitive development and several risk factors have been identified as having substantial negative effects on the development of executive functions.



Low SES, adverse childhood events (ACEs), and negative early experiences with family and caregivers are associated with poor executive functions (Berthelsen et al. 2017; Willoughby et al., 2019; Menon et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that these risk factors alter the developmental trajectory away from the maturation of higher order cognitive skills and towards building capacity for rapid threat detection (Malarbi et al., 2017).

It is well documented that homeless and at-risk youth have higher exposure to ACEs, are predominantly from lower SES backgrounds, and often have negative early experiences with parents and caregivers (Barnes et al., 2021; Narayan et al., 2016). The accumulation and interaction of these risk factors renders them highly vulnerable to poorer executive functioning and associated behavioural outcomes such as impulsivity, difficulties with planning and executing tasks, organisation, and emotional reactivity (Malarbi et al., 2017). Further, the emergence of major mental health disorders including substance use disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, and first episode psychosis predominantly occurs in adolescence and early adulthood and is associated with substantial impacts on cognitive processes including the executive functions (Blais et al., 2024; Fisher et al., 2016).

Evidence suggests proficient executive functioning predicts academic achievement, social functioning, and later life wellbeing with more accuracy than IQ and thus represents an important target for intervention, particularly in populations with multiple contributing factors to poorer executive functioning such as multiple ACEs and/or mental illness (Willoughby et al., 2019).

Research has established that the provision of interventions aimed at remediating the impact of mental illness on later life functioning must occur early in the disease process (Gibb et al., 2010). Whilst early intervention for support with self-regulation and approaches to learning have been identified as helpful for later development of executive function, access to such programs is limited for children living in circumstances that place them at greater risk of homelessness during adolescence (Berthelsen et al., 2017). Therefore, involvement with a youth specific service supporting at-risk young people provides an opportunity to deliver specialised executive function intervention for highly vulnerable young people. Further, with emerging evidence suggesting executive functioning deficits may underpin many different psychological disorders there is scope for the executive functions to provide a transdiagnostic focus for intervention (Romer & Pizzagalli., 2021).

The Alcohol and drug Cognitive Enhancement (ACE) cognitive remediation program was developed to assist people with substance use disorder improve their executive functions, which are often impaired in this population (Fernández-serrano et al., 2010). Recently, the ACE program was modified and adapted to be usable with other populations characterised by executive dysfunction. This included a name change to the Advancing Cognition and Executive-functioning Flexibly (ACE-Flex) program. Ethics approval for the implementation of a feasibility trial of the ACE-Flex program at Oasis Youth Sydney was granted by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics committee and recruitment for the study has begun. Due to the high acuity and complex vulnerabilities of presentations to the service, recruitment for the program is necessarily stringent and it is expected that the duration of the study will be amended to reflect this.

## 6. ACON

### <ACON's ACCVS (Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme)>

While loneliness and isolation can affect anyone's mental health, the impact can be more severe for older people.

ACON's ACCVS aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness, and to build community connection for older LGBTQ+ community members. It does this by arranging volunteer visitors to our older community members to provide friendship and companionship.

Our trained volunteer visitors provide peer connections, friendship and support to older LGBTQ+ folk. Some activities could include home visits, chat over a cuppa, listen to music, watch a movie or participate in a hobby, game or other activity.

ACON's ACCVS is a FREE service that is funded to operate across the Greater Sydney area. This program is available to recipients of Australian Government subsidised Home Care Packages or Residential Aged Care Facility.

If you would like to refer someone to ACON's Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme please use our [Intake Form - ACON](#) or email [bhcare@acon.org.au](mailto:bhcare@acon.org.au)

*The service is proudly funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health.*

### <Community Support Network>

For more than 30 years our Community Support Network (CSN) program has supported the quality of life, independence, and choices of people living with HIV in New South Wales.

CSN provides FREE practical assistance to help people living with HIV live as independently as possible in their own homes.

This program is available to people who have a diagnosis of physical or cognitive impairment as a result of, or in the presence of, HIV infection resulting in impaired capacity for independent living.

CSN has trained volunteers that offer services around:

- basic cleaning
- gardening
- grocery shopping
- doing the laundry
- meal preparation
- transport to and from medical appointments

If you are interested or would like to refer someone to ACON's CSN program, please complete the [Online Intake Form](#) or email [hbcare@acon.org.au](mailto:hbcare@acon.org.au) and a Client Service Officer from the Home-based Care team will undertake an intake assessment and discuss eligibility and suitability for the programs

*ACON's CSN service is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health.*

## 7. Odyssey House

*Author: <Taylor Hammes, Team Leader>*

*<Odyssey House NSW Providing Holistic Support Services for Central and Eastern Sydney>*

Odyssey House NSW Community Programs provides holistic support to families and loved ones impacted by someone using alcohol/drugs in their life. These services offer guidance, connection, and professional assistance to those who may feel overwhelmed or unsure about how to support their affected loved ones.

We offer free and confidential individual support sessions, as well as a dedicated online group for families and friends. The SMART Family and Friends Group meets every Tuesday evening, providing a safe space for individuals to connect with others facing similar challenges. The group offers education on substance use, coping strategies, and emotional support from our trained, friendly staff. Please contact us at 1800-397-739 if you are interested to join.

In addition to group sessions, individual support is also available. Those seeking one-on-one support first undergo an assessment to determine their specific needs. Tailored support is then provided to help them navigate the complexities of their loved one's substance use and its impact on their own well-being.

### *<Community Support Network>*

Recognising the diverse needs of Sydney's population, Odyssey continues to provide support through a Mandarin-speaking counsellor to ensure culturally appropriate support is available. This service aims to break down language barriers and provide more accessible care to Mandarin-speaking individuals who require assistance in understanding and managing the effects of a loved one's substance use.

These initiatives highlight Odyssey's commitment to providing holistic support to families and communities affected by substance use. By addressing the needs of both people using alcohol and drugs along with their loved ones, the organisation fosters a more informed and resilient support network, ultimately benefiting both individuals and their families.

Odyssey House NSW encourages individuals to reach out if they are interested or would like more information

1800 397 739 and option 2 to connect with our Community Programs.

## 8. Sector news, additional resources, other upcoming events, training and webinars

- **NSW Health Safety Notice:** A white tablet containing a nitazene (protonitazene) has caused severe opioid overdose in Sydney

[Click here to read the full notice](#)



- **[Research paper – The size and gap of unmet AOD treatment need in Australia](#)**  
The study assesses the unmet demand for alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment in Australia by estimating both the number of individuals in need of treatment and those currently receiving it.
- **Are co-occurring conditions on your training calendar this year?**  
The Guidelines on co-occurring conditions online training program provides freely available, evidence-based training for co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions. Training was developed by researchers from the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney in consultation with families and carers, people with lived experience, clinicians, academics, researchers, policy makers.  
[Register here.](#)
- **S-Check app is now live**  
Researchers at the National Centre for Clinical Research on Emerging Drugs (NCCRED) have launched the [S-Check app](#) - now live in app stores! The app is designed for people who use methamphetamine, helping them to understand the impact of use on their overall health.
- Text the effects and get drug info instantly via SMS – **Alcohol and Drug Foundation**  
For anonymous information fast, text a drug name to 0439 835 563. New substances are added often, and texting in a slang name for a drug will still get an accurate reply.  
[Learn more](#)
- **AOD Awards for the NSW Non-government Sector**  
NADA invites nominations for the 2025 AOD Awards for the NSW Non-government Sector. The awards acknowledge the significant contribution of NADA members in preventing and reducing alcohol and other drug related harms across NSW communities through leadership, innovative program design and delivery, and workforce dedication.  
[Nominations are now open](#)
- **NADA International Women's Day Forum 2025 – 11 March, Sydney**  
NADA invites members to take time out to attend this celebration of International Women's Day  
[Register here](#)
- **A cross-sector forum – In Practice: Ideas to solutions – 25 March, Newcastle**  
This forum will address key issues for frontline workers including homelessness, responding to changes in GHB use, a holistic diversion program and naloxone.  
[Get tickets here](#)
- **NADA Conference 2025 – Strength in Community: Building a brighter, kinder future – 5-6 June 2025, Sydney**  
Keynotes: Dr Tracy Westerman AM, Matt Brown from She is Not Your Rehab, and more to come.  
[Register now](#)

If you would like CESPHN to meet with you to discuss these or any of our other AOD referral options with you, please contact the AOD team at [aodnewsletters@cesphn.com.au](mailto:aodnewsletters@cesphn.com.au)

For more information about our programs visit

[www.cesphn.org.au/allied-health/help-my-patients-with/drug-and-alcohol-support](http://www.cesphn.org.au/allied-health/help-my-patients-with/drug-and-alcohol-support)