



How do we add the missing piece?

**An ATOD Consumer
Representative Organisation
for Tasmania**

Options Paper Summary

No Harm, No Discrimination

atdc
Alcohol, Tobacco and other
Drugs Council Tasmania



*"I realised that I could finally admit I was struggling, that I needed help.
Because finally, I was talking to someone who had been through it too, and wouldn't judge me."*

**Andy, 38, on accessing a consumer representative
service in QLD before returning to Tasmania**

"You go to the mainland and they have an actual organisation for drug users that the government funds! It's amazing and helped me so much. It sends a message you know? It says 'we still recognise you as human beings, who deserve to be heard', and that made all the difference."

Tasha, 23, eastern shore resident

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No Harm, No Discrimination



About the ATDC

The ATDC is the peak body representing and supporting community organisations, and the people they assist, to reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug related harm for all Tasmanians. Our vision is a Tasmania without alcohol, tobacco or other drug related harm or discrimination.

Problematic use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs continues to be a major cause of harm in Tasmania, and is a significant driver of preventable death, disease and illness, psychological distress, unemployment, homelessness, police arrests and prison sentences.

As an independent not-for-profit organisation, the ATDC represents a broad range of alcohol, tobacco and other drug organisations. These organisations provide information and awareness, prevention and early intervention, harm-reduction and specialised treatment and recovery services and programs.

Working with all levels of government and the community, the ATDC plays a vital role in leading, collaborating and advocating for increased investment into treatment services, and population based initiatives that reduce the harms associated with problematic substance use across Tasmania.

The ATDC supports the sector by delivering training, networking and information sharing opportunities, as well as undertaking policy and advocacy projects with, and on behalf of our members. At all times our work is underpinned by a commitment to evidence-based practices and policies, consumer participation, harm reduction, and partnerships and collaboration.

The ATDC position

The ATDC supports the funding of an incorporated, independent, state-wide consumer representative organisation.

The provision of a dedicated resource that is run by peers and for peers offers the best opportunity to create a sustainable and meaningful consumer voice in the Tasmanian ATOD sector.

It is recognised by all that a consumer representative organisation is the 'missing piece' in our sector.

To continue, as we are, without a meaningful consumer voice, is untenable and likely to lead to further marginalisation of people that use drugs.

This position is shared by consumers and those working in the Tasmanian ATOD sector.



Consumer Representative Options Paper Summary

- There is widespread support across the Tasmanian alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) sector for greater and more meaningful model of consumer engagement.
- Most Australian states and territories have had a government funded consumer representative organisation for some time.
- Currently, the lack of a consumer voice in Tasmania (the 'missing piece') means that the ATOD sector lacks the means to adequately consider, respond to and act on the information and expertise only consumers can provide through meaningful engagement.
- The Tasmanian Government recognises the importance of the consumer voice, articulated in the *Reform Agenda for Alcohol and Drug Services in Tasmania*, calling for increased capacity for ATOD consumers to have a say in their treatment as well as the "... *planning, implementation, delivery and evaluation of ATOD services in Tasmania*".
- The lack of a Tasmanian consumer representative organisation presents a risk for organisations seeking accreditation against health standards with regard to consumer engagement processes.
- A review of eight consumer organisations in Australia showed five common features: the organisations were run 'for peers by peers', they occupied a unique and valued niche role in their service systems, there were two broad audiences for these organisations (consumers themselves and mainstream health services), all organisations engaged in advocacy about how to improve the health system, and lastly nearly all saw advancing the health, human rights and dignity of people who use drugs as an overarching aim of the organisations' work.
- For this project, consumer representatives and ATOD sector representatives were consulted.
- During this process the ATDC was mindful that the development of any proposal for a consumer representative organisation must prioritise and engage consumers themselves, in order for the end result to be relevant, credible and lead to sustainable outcomes.
- From consultations the 'sweet spot' was identified. This refers to the core themes which consistently emerged during the consultation process across both consumer and ATOD sector representatives with regards to the services to be provided, to whom they will be provided, and who will make decisions on the delivery of those services.
- The 'sweet spot' encompassed six points: the organisation should be run by peers and be for peers, that the organisation will be most effective if it is a standalone independent organisation, that it must have a sole focus on alcohol and other drugs (rather than be part of a generic health consumer body or merge with another existing body), there should be a focus on vulnerable and marginalised communities, that harm reduction is a central principle underpinning the organisation's approach and that reducing stigma and discrimination is a key role.