

Who is VAADA?

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association Inc. is a peak organisation, which aims to minimise the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use within the Victorian community.

VAADA's membership comprises agencies working in the fields of alcohol and other drug dependence as well as those individuals who are involved in, or have a specific interest in, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation or research that minimises the harms caused by alcohol and other drugs (AOD).

What does VAADA do?

In order to achieve its goals, VAADA advocates for governments and the broader community to support and implement the best possible prevention / treatment policies and services for those Victorians experiencing harms associated with alcohol and other drug use. VAADA supports evidence based practice that maintains the dignity of its clients.

VAADA provides services to support its membership to achieve these aims which include:

- Developing effective democratic and representative structures
- Advocating for, and represent, the Victorian alcohol, drugs and allied fields to government and key policy making bodies
- Providing leadership, advocacy and representation of the Victorian alcohol, drugs and allied fields to the broader community
- Improving the quality of alcohol, drug and allied services provided to the community

Our history

VAADA became an incorporated association in 1981 and was created as forum for agencies working in the fields of alcohol and other drug dependence, as well as those individual interested in alleviating the harms caused by alcohol and other drugs. VAADA's role was to provide mutual support for its members as well as facilitating planning, development in the fields of alcohol and other drug dependence. It was also envisaged that VAADA would have an educative and information role for both its member agencies and the broader community.

VAADA's membership has always been broadly based and its organisational membership ranges from 'drug specific' organisations to hospitals, community health centres, primary health organisations, religious, general youth, local government and others (eg. schools, counselling services, correctional/diversion services, legal services).

Part 1 Strategic Context

Key Trends & Issues

As a statewide, peak organisation, VAADA seeks to promote the issue of general health and wellbeing by advocating for a society where the harms associated with alcohol and other drug (AOD) use are reduced. Critical to this is the need to promote the issue of these harms whilst also attempting to reduce the stigma of those people who seek to examine their relationship with alcohol and other drugs.

The capacity to work effectively with this paradox is strongly influenced by the broader context of community opinion towards alcohol and other drug use and the government's policy direction in relation to AOD issues.

The sector has noted a trend towards conservatism in response to AOD related issues at a national and international level that has implications for Victoria. Community perceptions about AOD issues are increasingly driving the agenda. Social policy directions are leaning towards addressing AOD issues in the context of justice and the reduction of crime. This emphasis on criminal justice has implications for how the community understands the complexity of AOD issues and their overlapping with a range of other social issues (child protection, family violence, mental health, etc).

The broader social policy context has implications for AOD agencies and how the government relates to the sector. In particular, the government's strategy to work in partnership with local communities is an increasing emphasis that may influence the way government works with the AOD sector.

Broader policy directions relating to the value of community service organisations in the provision of services are impacting on the AOD sector. Notably, the lack of growth funding during the 1990s continues to be felt by agencies and affects the services they provide. Episodic funding and the lack of funding for program evaluation have implications for the sustainability and effectiveness of services.

Future changes to the AOD service system are on the horizon as the Victorian Government considers its response to the recent service system review. While such evaluations and reviews are welcomed, the expectation for cost-neutral changes potentially creates new challenges for AOD services. One such challenge is the workforce development initiative – an opportunity to explore training and accreditation options, yet with no resources for quality improvement associated with this initiative.

Amidst these changes to the service system and the growing conservatism is the changing context of alcohol & other drug use – AOD agencies anticipate an increase in the use of amphetamines and psychostimulants, often occurring in a context of poly-drug use. The implications for treatment responses to these changing patterns of alcohol & other drug use are yet to be analysed. Furthermore, there is an increase in the range of drugs available (potentially affecting a broad range of age groups). At the same time, there is often inadequate and, at times, inappropriate information available to the community. This raises ongoing challenges for the government, the community and the drug treatment service system.

Not only are patterns of alcohol & other drug use changing, so too are the clientele who use the services in the AOD sector. A significant challenge to the sector is the increasing complexity of clients, particularly in relation to co-morbidity and other health implications, such as acquired brain injury. This is coupled with increased expectations on services around risk management and shared case management of clients with co-morbid conditions.

As a peak body, the challenge for VAADA is to advocate within this context for a society where the harms associated with alcohol & other drug use are minimised (including the stigma associated with alcohol & other drug use, addiction and recovery).

Stakeholders Needs & Issues

Understanding the needs and issues of our stakeholders is critical in defining the strategic direction of VAADA and how we intend to respond to stakeholder issues that are intertwined with the broader trends.

Key among the needs and issues of our stakeholders are those of our membership. VAADA has identified a need to develop greater clarity about who comprises our membership, what their needs and issues are in the broader context and how the peak body can most effectively take up those issues.

The service and support needs, alongside other identified issues of alcohol and other drug users (and their social networks), are also critical in defining VAADA's direction.

The needs and issues that the community raise in relation to AOD issues will continue to be monitored closely by VAADA.

VAADA is also aware that members of parliament and the government (in particular DHS) will determine some of the issues that are important for VAADA to engage with.

VAADA values its partnerships with other peak bodies and community organisations that have an interest in the issue of the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use and other common issues relating to NGOs (such as funding and broader government policy direction in regard to community services).

Stakeholder views

VAADA seeks to ensure that the issues for people experiencing the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use and the organisations that support them are well represented in policy, program development and public discussion.

VAADA's members are seeking greater involvement and inclusion with the peak body. Members consider that the sector will benefit from increased clarity around VAADA's strategic direction together with ongoing engagement and better service to members. The need for a strong and visible peak body, with a clearly defined purpose, was identified.

For government, VAADA has an important role to play as a voice of the sector. As a peak body, VAADA has considerable value to offer the government through consolidating the perspective of the sector and presenting this to the government – making VAADA a critical sounding board on new policy initiatives.

Politicians look to VAADA for information about issues relating to alcohol and other drugs. They seek to hear what solutions there are to problems that exist in the community. VAADA perceives a need to improve its communication with politicians and bureaucrats to provide clarity in what its purpose and goals are.

Implications for VAADA

In response to the needs and issues of its members and stakeholders (occurring in the context of the broader trends confronting the AOD sector), VAADA identified the importance of pursuing a range of directions.

VAADA identified a need to increase our leadership in advocacy and policy development through our members. As a peak, we seek to achieve this through the development of a clear policy direction based on the knowledge and insight of our membership. We seek to provide ways that encourage members to engage with VAADA around the development of policy.

VAADA identified a need to strengthen its relationship with the membership – in particular, to develop a more inclusive and expansive approach for members across the AOD sector. Important within this more inclusive approach is

engaging with front-line workers. We want to provide a more effective service to our members through better information provision and a clearer understanding of our member's needs and issues.

For VAADA, an important goal is to increase our emphasis on bringing community along as a means of influencing political attitudes. We need to achieve this through improving both our own and our member's relationship with the media and other sectors.

VAADA identified a need to strengthen its relationship with the media – to increase our responsiveness and to use the media as an educative tool for the broader community. The media seeks VAADA's views on current issues and has expectations that the peak body can provide them with commentary on the views of the AOD sector on relevant issues.

We want to encourage the involvement of other professional sectors in addressing alcohol and other drug issues. VAADA aims to improve and expand our relationship with other sectors around common issues.

To achieve its goals, a key implication for VAADA is to continue strengthening as an organisation through improved governance and decision-making processes. Also important is greater clarity regarding the peak body's role, its purpose and its unique identity within the AOD sector. VAADA aims to consolidate some of these developments through a review of our constitution.

Finally, VAADA recognises the importance of strengthening and broadening our financial base in order to achieve its goals effectively.

Part 2 Strategic Plan

Vision

A Victorian community in which the harms associated with drug use are reduced and general health and well being is promoted.

Mission

To provide leadership, representation, advocacy and information on behalf of the alcohol and other drug and related sectors.

Our Values

The values that guide the way VAADA works are:

- **Transparency** – to be accountable to its members and stakeholders
- **Professionalism** – to work with integrity and ethical conduct
- **Leadership** – to demonstrate strength, courage and commitment to the vision and mission that drive us and to be strategic in our thinking.
- **Representative** – to be inclusive, participatory and democratic; and to consult with our members and represent the issues of the sector relating to harms associated with alcohol and other drug use.
- **Collaboration** – to encourage, and provide a space for, collaboration within a competitive environment.

Strategic Directions

We will advance the interests of the AOD sector through the following outcomes, action priorities and success measures:

1. Increasing policy development and advocacy

Outcomes

- Increased opportunity for member involvement in policy development
- Policy development mechanisms built on member input
- Leadership of the sector in policy and advocacy
- Active development and promotion of policies

Priorities for Action

1. Develop consistent and transparent mechanisms for policy development and member and sector consultation
2. Consult with members and identify their priority issues
3. Establish sub-committee or working group to prioritise key policy areas VAADA to engage on
4. Develop policy positions on VAADA's key priority areas
5. Develop process for determining how and when VAADA responds (or doesn't respond) to issues that arise outside its priority agenda
6. Develop an advocacy strategy for promoting VAADA policy positions
7. Hold forums to debate policy issues

Measures of Success

- Clear process for developing policy, for consultation and for determining how VAADA reacts to urgent issues
- Level of engagement by members and key stakeholders in policy focused sub-committees
- Position papers emerging from policy focused sub-committees
- Strategy for advocacy and promotion of VAADA's positions

2. Strengthening VAADA's profile

Outcomes

- Greater visibility of VAADA in the sector, the community and in policy debates
- Strong VAADA profile as a key spokesperson for the AOD sector
- Improved media profile and PR savvy
- Strengthen confidence in VAADA's role as a peak advocacy body

Priorities for Action

1. Strengthen profile to members and sector through providing opportunity to engage in policy and advocacy, achieving results and demonstrating them
2. Develop a strategy for communicating relevant issues more effectively to stakeholders and members
3. Develop a media strategy – define purpose in engaging with the media and ensure clear messages
4. Develop procedures for working with media, generating media stories, and establish ethics for working with media
5. Re-establish links with media – determine which media links are a priority
6. Provide opportunity for staff to develop skills in working with media
7. Hold forums and annual conference on issues of interest to sector and community
8. Strengthen relationship with key bureaucrats and Minister's office

Measures of Success

- Level of engagement in VAADA activities
- Increased staff expertise and confidence in working with media
- Links established with key media contacts
- Documentation of how VAADA works with the media
- Extent of media take-up from VAADA media releases, etc

3. Strengthening relationships with members and key stakeholders

Outcomes

- Stronger relationships with members and key stakeholders
- High satisfaction with service provided by VAADA to members
- Improved collaboration and links with other sectors
- More advocacy in areas of importance to members

Priorities for Action

1. Establish and conduct regular survey of members needs
2. Establish a profile of VAADA's membership – who are our current members?
3. Review operational plans and priorities in response to issues raised by members and sector
4. Identify key stakeholders and key linkages with other sectors
5. Design a strategy for improving relationship with each key stakeholder
6. Establish mechanisms for effective and ongoing liaison with other sectors – (e.g. VCOSS and other peaks)
7. Develop working groups or forums for discussion of issues relevant to members, the sector and stakeholders

Measures of Success

- Members and stakeholders satisfaction
- Number of members
- Membership structure – establishment of sub-committees or working groups and avenues for member participation
- Extent of involvement with other peak bodies and relevant community groups

4. Ensuring organisational sustainability and efficiency

Outcomes

- Identified additional funding sources and sought funding
- Greater efficiency and effectiveness – more focussed priorities
- Strengthen and clarify governance arrangements
- All activities and projects aligned with strategic plan

Priorities for Action

1. Review constitution, define membership, membership procedures and our existing principles
2. Define more clearly who or what we represent – ie, just treatment services or the broader AOD sector or the issues relevant to the sector or membership?
3. Explore opportunities for additional funding across sectors
4. Review governance and decision-making arrangements and procedures including principles for project submissions

Measures of Success

- Governance performance – outcomes of governance review, revised governance policies, constitution review, etc.
- Financial performance
- Organisational health – staff retention, committed Board, etc.