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Preventing family violence: substance use should not be a barrier to achieving change

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) is pleased to release the position paper entitled [*Strengthening the Role of the Alcohol and Other Drug \(AOD\) Sector in Responding to Gendered Violence*](#) in support of the international [*16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence*](#) campaign.

This paper highlights the intersection between alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV), revealing gaps in program support for people who use drugs that also use violence.

While not all people who use substances perpetrate family violence, when gendered and intersectional drivers of family violence are present, substance use consistently acts as an amplifier of harm.

Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) have traditionally excluded people who use substances, despite clear and consistent evidence linking substance use and the perpetration of DFSV. In Victoria, around two-thirds of intimate partner homicide offenders report high levels of AOD use around the time of the offence.

VAADA's position paper, in highlighting the service gaps, reveals the opportunities to achieve better outcomes in reducing the prevalence of DFSV. It demonstrates the skill set and core values underpinning AOD work, which can lead to behaviour change. While most men will never voluntarily engage in a Men's Behaviour Change Program, many do willingly engage with AOD services.

This paper makes a number of recommendations, including the statewide expansion of the [*U-Turn program*](#), specific co-designed program supports for at-risk community groups (such as First Nations and LGBTIQ+ communities) and greater investment in cross-sector capacity building, sector stewardship and governance.

Meg Bagnol, VAADA Lead AOD and Family Violence, says, 'Substance use is too often overlooked in family violence responses, despite consistently increasing the severity and frequency of harm when gendered drivers are present. We cannot keep treating this as a side issue. If we want to prevent death and serious injury, we must build programs that meet people where they already seek help, and that means resourcing the AOD sector to be part of the solution.'

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact David Taylor on 0413 914 206.

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Media stories on alcohol and other drugs may be traumatic for some people. Support is available, and we ask that media agencies consider publishing the details below:

If this story has raised issues about your or others' drug and alcohol use, contact the national hotline for confidential counselling and referral on 1800 250 015

VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. Daily, these services deal with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.