



WAPHA
WA Primary Health Alliance

phn
PERTH NORTH, PERTH SOUTH,
COUNTRY WA
An Australian Government Initiative

Media Release

Big picture view needed to address alcohol and drug use

7 August 2017

Problematic use of alcohol and other drugs, including methamphetamine, continues to have a significant and widespread impact on individuals, families and entire communities.

System integration and better access to appropriate services is needed to ensure people get the support they need.

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) is focused on building the capacity of primary care to respond to problematic use and improving access and connection to specialist treatment services for those that need it. GPs are fundamental to this approach.

WAPHA chief executive officer Learne Durrington says irrespective of the drug of concern, the focus needs to be on making sure anyone experiencing problems with alcohol and other drug use, but particularly those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, can get connected to services that can help.

“We can’t treat drug use in isolation or give in to stereotypes about illicit drug users. Alcohol related harm remains a significant burden on our health system and is a notable risk factor in suicides,” Ms Durrington said.

“We know that people using drugs often experience mental and/or physical health issues at the same time, may be using more than one drug at once, or also be having problems with over the counter and prescription medications.

“There’s no quick fix or easy answer to such a complex problem. It requires us to keep our eye on the big picture and for everyone to work together to make a real difference and keep our people well.”



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Key Facts*

- Alcohol is the most prevalent drug used in WA and causes the most drug-related harm (excluding tobacco) in the community.
- Around one in five (21.6 per cent) Western Australians over 14 years of age are drinking at risk of lifetime harm and about one in five (17 per cent) recently used illicit drugs.
- In WA, more than half of all domestic and more than a third of all non-domestic assaults are alcohol related.
- Based on various national and international studies, it is estimated that at least 20 to 50 per cent of people with an alcohol or other drug problem also have a co-occurring mental illness.
- There is frequently an increase in alcohol and other drug use in the period before a person suicides.

*Source: Western Australian Mental Health Commission (2015). *Better Choices. Better Lives. Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015 – 2025.*

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About WAHPA: WAPHA oversees the strategic commissioning functions of the Perth North, Perth South and Country WA Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The WA PHNs are three of 31 PHNs established by the Australian Government nationally to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. We work across the WA healthcare system with doctors, allied health professionals, Area Health Services and service providers to improve the coordination of care for people who are at risk of poor health outcomes. For more information, visit www.wapha.org.au