

MISSION OF THE WEST COAST REGIONAL ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE PLAN

“To promote the safety and wellbeing of all community members by reducing the availability, impacts and harms associated with the use of alcohol and other substances”.

VISION FOR WEST COAST REGIONAL ALCOHOL AN SUBSTANCE MISUSE PLAN

“The West Coast community is well informed, active and successful in reducing alcohol and other drug related harm and improving the quality of life of individuals, families and communities”.

Points for Consideration:

- ***It is evident that harmful alcohol consumption has increased in our communities in recent years. This may be attributed to a number of factors such as: easy availability and access to alcohol, persons being pressured into buying alcohol, and alcohol being supplied to individuals who may be barred or not able to provide identification by other persons and through other sources.***
- ***All liquor outlets within a radius of 200 kilometres of Ceduna including Nullarbor Roadhouse should be signatories to a Regional West Coast Alcohol Accord to deter ‘grog running’ and other illegal sales of alcohol and to reduce large quantities of alcohol being purchased, such as fortified wine or wine casks, spirits and beer.***
- ***We know that alcohol use contributes to violence and arrests and creates community unrest in the wider sections of the Ceduna and surrounding communities. There are intoxicated drinkers using services to sober up safely and receive meals but also sourcing funds through other means to maintain their cycle of harmful drinking on a daily basis. Little or no money is left to spend on food, personal clothing or other daily necessities.***
- ***Many children are going without food and essential clothing and, as a result, failing to attend school. To assist and support drinkers to eat well and care for their own personal well-being strong consideration also needs to be given to the possible introduction of targeted income management support which will ensure that the daily purchase of alcohol does not become the prime motivator in people’s lives. These are but a few of the range of issues associated with the complexities of this initiative which must be dealt with as part of a well-coordinated service delivery approach and with appropriate supportive legislation.***
- As part of this plan, community councils and local action groups will be supported to build the capacity of their communities in harm reduction, demand reduction and supply reduction of alcohol. Phase One of the plan includes clear timeframes, outcomes and measurements to ensure that services are held accountable in the rollout of strategies and actions. A lead agency or agencies are nominated to co-ordinate particular actions with support agencies which have agreed to work cooperatively in a co-ordinated community approach.

- This is an evidence based plan, informed by the experiences and evaluations of other communities dealing with alcohol and other drug issues. In line with learning's from these evaluations, there is a focus in the plan on prevention strategies and actions. Young people, our next generation, are a key target group in order to break the cycle of alcohol and other substance related harm.
- Sadly, over the past 10 to 15 years there have been several Indigenous leaders from the region who have died prematurely. Currently, there is a gap between existing leaders and the next generation of young people. We need to bridge this gap and also protect and promote the next generation of leaders coming up so that they don't become vulnerable to the range of social pressures upon them. We would like to strengthen our Indigenous leaders and support our prospective leaders of the future.

Breaking the Cycle of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Indigenous Communities (BtC) is an Australian Government funded initiative that aims to:

- ***Assist Indigenous communities to work with government and non-government organisations to develop and implement alcohol and substance abuse management plans;***
- ***Support community groups and non-profit organisations to work at a local level in order to drive the alcohol and substance abuse management plans and support the community; and***
- ***Provide prevention programs to tackle youth substance abuse.***

The West Coast region of South Australia was selected as one of five regions across Australia where the BtC initiative would be implemented. The targeted communities in the region were nominated as Ceduna, Yalata, Oak Valley, Scotdesco and Koonibba.

One of the catalysts for the nomination of the West Coast region was the release of the Deputy Coroner's report into the deaths of six Anangu people in and around Ceduna and where heavy consumption of alcohol was a significant factor in each death (2011).

In June 2012 the Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation (CAC) was appointed the 'lead service provider' for the initiative in the West Coast region. The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) is the Australian government agency responsible for the initiative, working with the South Australian Government and the District Council of Ceduna.

The West Coast Alcohol and Substance Misuse Action Group (the Action Group) provides strategic oversight and support for the implementation of the initiative.

CAC developed a project plan and community consultations commenced in July 2012. The University of Adelaide provided expert assistance on alcohol and other drug issues during the consultation and development phases of the management plan.

- ***The brief for the plan required that it encompass the whole of the West Coast region of South Australia; target all people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) living in the area; address alcohol and other substance abuse across the spectrum; and include strategies to prevent and reduce the uptake of alcohol or other drug use, early interventions and demand, supply and harm reduction strategies.***
- ***Alcohol problems on the West Coast of SA have been long-standing and there is a considerable history of consultations, community discussions and a succession of reports and plans developed to tackle the issues over many years.***

ISSUES AND MAIN FINDINGS

Several key issues emerged early in the consultation process:-

- *There are a group of Anangu people, mainly from Yalata and Oak Valley communities who either reside semi-permanently in Ceduna or who visit frequently for extended stays. Some of these Anangu drink large quantities of alcohol and are a very high risk of a range of harms as a result.*
- *Consultations confirmed that the region has very distinct groups of drinkers, warranting different actions of response. These groups range from the chronic drinkers who drink to intoxication every day, heavy drinkers who drink most days with occasional periods without drinking, periodic heavy drinkers who are often sober and hold down productive jobs, social drinkers and occasional drinkers who generally do not drink to excess as well as the non-drinkers. There is also the group of young people who have started, or will likely start, experimenting with alcohol and the young children who do not themselves drink but witness drinking on the streets and in their homes.*
- *A range of services including the Sobering Up Unit (SUU) and Mobile Assistance Patrol (MAP), Day Centre and Town Camp have been operating in Ceduna to assist those people coming from outlying communities and others who drink heavily.*
- Other people living on the West Coast also experience alcohol-related problems. Binge drinking is common and is not solely restricted to younger people. There are high levels of alcohol consumption amongst some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Ceduna, Penong, Koonibba, Scotdesco and in rural areas.
- There are also problems associated with the use of other drugs, particularly cannabis and amphetamines and the misuse of pharmaceutical drugs.
- The use of volatile substances including petrol sniffing is a periodic and concerning issue for most communities as it usually involves very young people.
- *There are also problems associated with 'grog running' and the consumption of alcohol in the dry communities of Yalata and Oak Valley and around the Nundroo Roadhouse.*
- There is a lack of healthy alternative activities in all communities, particularly for young people.
- Transport to and from outlying communities and within some communities was identified as a significant causative problem as people become stranded in Ceduna with no way of returning home.
- There is an urgent need to better coordinate 'on the ground' government and non-government services to more effectively deal with alcohol and other drug problems.
- Housing and homelessness were identified as significant contributing factors. Anangu people who choose to live in Ceduna find it almost impossible to find housing there. We were told that should all those people 'sleeping rough' around Ceduna choose to return to their home communities this would add significantly to the existing housing crises in their communities.

The Aboriginal history of removal from their ancestral lands, marginalization by white settlers, successive government policies including assimilation and removal of children, exploitation of Aboriginal labour, introduced diseases, lack of recognition of cultural values and many other practices contributed significantly to the deep sense of grief and loss that permeates many Aboriginal communities. Alcohol abuse is one outcome of this history, as

Aboriginal people found the numbing effects of alcohol and other drugs a relief from unremitting feelings of sadness and loss. The intergenerational impact of this history cause current generations to continue to suffer and some to seek solace in alcohol.

There are also more immediate causes of significantly higher rates of problematic alcohol and other drug use amongst Aboriginal people on the West Coast. These include:

- ***Poor education and consequent lack of real employment opportunities***
- ***Lack of resources and suitably qualified workers in remote communities***
- ***High cost of delivery of services to remote locations***
- ***Lack of recreational and other creative alternatives***

The older generation of strong Aboriginal leaders is diminishing and in many communities the next generation of leaders is struggling to step up. However, hope remains. In the words of one Elder from Yalata, *"I have been talking about this for a long, long time now is an opportunity and I have hopefulness."*

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The research evidence of what works most effectively in reducing the impact of alcohol and other drugs in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities shows that supply reduction strategies are likely to have most impact and be less costly to implement. A number of supply reduction strategies have already been implemented in the West Coast region and this plan supports and recommends extension of some of these measures, including later opening of take-away liquor outlets, greater controls on availability of high alcohol content liquor and measures to reduce the flow of illicit alcohol into dry communities.

Many of the very heavy drinkers who are rough sleepers in and around Ceduna are at great risk of a range of alcohol-related harms, ranging from road trauma and physical assault to long-term health problems including organic brain damage. Harm reduction strategies therefore figure prominently in the plan's strategies. These include safe transport and a designated 'safer' drinking area for rough sleepers.

Many of those consulted expressed great concern for younger people who are at risk due to the prevalence of alcohol in their communities and the role modelling around alcohol they see in their families and around them. There is thus an emphasis on increasing the number of education and awareness programs and diversionary activities, particularly targeting young people at school and youth services.

The consultation process also highlighted the need for greater and more effective treatment methods to assist those who have significant alcohol or other drug problems. The lack of an accessible rehabilitation program was raised by many people. The plan acknowledges this but also aims for the development of a range of flexible demand reduction strategies including:

- ***Programs providing healthy alternatives (diversion)***
- ***Education and awareness programs***
- ***Youth leadership programs***
- ***Skill development and employment programs***

The fourth strategic area in the plan is Leadership and Service Coordination.

Improved policy development, leadership and service coordination will increase the effectiveness of all interventions proposed under the plan. Dedicated service coordination and collaboration will ensure an integrated approach to service delivery across the region.

IDENTIFIED PRIORITY AREAS

THE PLAN HAS BEEN DEVELOPED TO RESPOND TO CURRENT, PRESSING ISSUES IN THE REGION, WHILE TAKING A LONG-TERM APPROACH TO ACHIEVE AND SUSTAIN A REDUCTION IN THE HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL AND OTHER SUBSTANCE USE.

Eight, broad priority areas for action have been determined, BASED ON CONSULTATIONS. The eight priority areas for action are:

- 1. Decrease access to alcohol/volatile substances***
- 2. Increase school retention***
- 3. Increase access to structured community diversionary activities***
- 4. Improve transport in Ceduna and to communities***
- 5. Increase accommodation in Ceduna***
- 6. Community/Government/Stakeholder coordination***
- 7. Service Coordination***
- 8. An agreed monitoring system***

The rationale for these priorities is:

- 1. Decreased access to alcohol and volatile substances** will reduce harm through a reduction in alcohol consumption and petrol inhalation. Restricting availability of alcohol and volatile substances will have short and long term reductions in harm. (Supply reduction)
- 2. Introducing and continuing a broad range of strategies to increase school attendance and retention** will ensure that the current generation of children and young people are better educated and have greater opportunities for future employment and stability in their lives. Engaging with parents and community members is instrumental to achieving this. (Demand reduction)
- 3. Increasing access to structured community diversionary activities** for both young people and for all community members encourages healthier choices and lifestyle options, both in the short term and long term. Diversionary activities that incorporate cultural elements enrich people's cultural connection and individual and community pride. (Demand reduction)
- 4. Improving transport within Ceduna and to communities** will see a significant improvement in service delivery. Regular, subsidised transport to communities enables people to return to their communities safely and minimises the multiple health and social problems created when people are stranded in Ceduna. Transport within Ceduna allows for better service delivery and safety of clients. (Harm reduction)
- 5. The current chronic shortage of accommodation options in Ceduna** creates ongoing health and social problems for visitors and the broader Ceduna community. Increasing the amount of short term and long term accommodation will have an

immediate impact in reducing the problems associated with homelessness and chronic poor health. (Harm reduction)

6. Genuine and sustained **Community, Government and Stakeholder engagement and coordination** is essential to ensure a long term reduction in alcohol and other substance-related harm in the region. The signatories to this Plan have pledged their commitment to support this community-led initiative and in so doing build community capacity. (Leadership and Service coordination)
7. **Service Coordination** is critical for working with Ceduna's most vulnerable clients, often referred to as the "rough sleepers" in Ceduna. Service coordination will ensure responsible case management and responsive models of care; as well as facilitate interagency networking and streamline a collaborative, community-based approach to services. (Leadership and Service coordination)
8. An external, **agreed monitoring system** will ensure that the key indicators on progress of the Plan are identified, regularly measured, evaluated and interpreted. (Leadership and Service coordination)