



Tracey Horsfall  
Productivity Commission  
Canberra City ACT 2601

## **Review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement**

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) welcomes the opportunity to provide written feedback to the Review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (the Agreement).

A complex relationship exists between mental health and alcohol and other drug use. People with mental health conditions or high or very high levels of psychological distress are more likely to drink at risky levels and are 1.8 times more likely to have used illicit drugs than people without these conditions.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, people with alcohol and other drug issues are more likely to have mental health conditions.<sup>2</sup> Harms associated with co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug conditions include poorer mental health and greater drug use severity, and increased risk of self-harm and suicide.<sup>3</sup> These issues do not just co-occur, they intersect in that poor mental health increases the likelihood and severity of alcohol and other drug use and suicidal distress – and vice versa.

Evidence indicates that between 50 – 76% of people accessing alcohol and other drug treatment throughout Australia have at least one co-occurring mental health condition.<sup>4</sup> To address this, the Western Australian alcohol and other drug sector has long been actively working to build their capability and responsiveness to co-occurring issues. Concerningly, it remains the experience of the Western Australian alcohol and other drug sector that addressing co-occurring alcohol and other drug issues in the mental health service sector is not reciprocated. This is particularly the experience in regional rural and remote locations, significantly contributing to the demand on alcohol and other drug services, increased presentations of complexity, longer access wait times, and pressures on the workforce.

The National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing indicated that 35 – 40% of people accessing a mental health service have a co-occurring alcohol and other drug issue.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike other jurisdictions, Western Australian alcohol and other drug service providers are funded to deliver suicide prevention programs. The Western Australian alcohol and other drug sector contributes to the delivery of services that coordinate suicide prevention and early intervention, support and aftercare, postvention, and programs for Aboriginal peoples and communities. Furthermore, alcohol and other drug service providers that are not specifically funded to deliver suicide prevention routinely assess suicide risk.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). [Mental health and substance use](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Marel, C., Siedlecka, E., Fisher, A., Gournay, K., Deady, M., Baker, A., Kay-Lambkin, F., Teesson, M., Baillie, A., & Mills, K. L. (2022). [Guidelines on the Management of co-occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions in alcohol and other drug treatment settings](#)

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). [Mental health and substance use](#)

<sup>5</sup> Ritter, A., & O'Reilly. (2025). [Unmet treatment need: The size of the gap for alcohol and other drugs in Australia](#)

Western Australia has experienced a steady increase in the rate of suicide death, from a low of 9.8 per 100,000 people (194 deaths) in 2004, to the third highest rate nationally of 14.3 deaths per 100,000 people (417 deaths) in 2023. Research indicates a 65% increased risk of suicidal behaviour when alcohol is consumed.<sup>6</sup>

WANADA is concerned that the central role of intersectional responsiveness between the mental health, suicide prevention and alcohol and other drugs systems are minimally considered within the Agreement. The Agreement presents a significant opportunity for the Productivity Commission to ensure intersectional responsiveness is at the heart of sustainably enhancing the mental health of all Australians.

Accordingly, the Western Australian Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention needs significantly more emphasis directed at the role of intersectionality between the mental health, suicide prevention and alcohol and other drug systems. This will provide an opportunity for the alcohol and other drug service sector to continue its responsiveness to both suicidal distress and mental health, while equally, the Western Australian mental health service sector will have the opportunity to increase its capability to be responsive to alcohol and other drugs. Across-government and cross-sector collaboration and coordination is critically needed to ensure the co-occurring needs of service users are met to reduce harms and increase health and wellbeing.

In partnership with the WA Association for Mental Health, WANADA developed and successfully piloted a co-occurring capability review tool (2021) based on international validated processes. Ideally, a rollout of this tool across the alcohol and other drug and mental health sectors would contribute to a better understanding of the barriers to increased responsiveness to co-occurring concerns in both sectors.<sup>7</sup>

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## About WANADA

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) is the peak body for the specialist alcohol and other drug education, prevention, treatment, harm reduction and support sector in Western Australia.

WANADA is an independent, membership-driven, not-for-profit association. Our purpose is to lead a shared voice within the specialist alcohol and other drug service sector that drives positive change needed to achieve best community outcomes.

Our membership reflects the quality and diversity of the alcohol and other drug sector in WA, comprising 96 services and additional individual members from across all regions of the state. WANADA is driven by the passion and hard work of its member organisations, which deliver a range of alcohol and other drug services, and system supports.

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<sup>6</sup> Suicide Prevention Australia & Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research and Education Group, The University of Sydney's Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use. (2022). [Closing the loop: Alcohol and other drugs in suicidality](#)

<sup>7</sup> WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies. (2022). [Capability Building - AOD, Mental Health and FDV](#)