

UnitingCare Australia advocates for shift to prevention and treatment in AOD Inquiry

UnitingCare Australia has appeared before the Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Use in Australia on 29 May 2026, alongside network partners Uniting Vic.Tas and Uniting NSW.ACT, calling for a stronger focus on prevention, early intervention and evidence-based treatment.

“We’re pleased to contribute to this Inquiry, bringing what we’re seeing on the ground from communities across Australia of people experiencing AOD related harm,” said Tamara Thomas, National Director of UnitingCare Australia.

The UnitingCare network highlighted AOD use as a major driver of preventable illness, social disadvantage and economic loss, and urged a shift towards more effective, community-based solutions.

“Our message is clear; we need to invest in what works. Right now, fewer than half of people who need alcohol and other drug treatment can access it, while proven approaches like harm reduction interventions receive a fraction of the funding,” Ms Thomas said.

UnitingCare providers emphasised the importance of expanding community-based supports that keep people connected, prevent needs from escalating into crisis, and reduce pressure on already stretched hospital, housing, justice and welfare systems.

“Improving the health impacts of AOD will require more than incremental change. It requires a shift in mindset, a commitment to fundamental values of human worth as well as evidence, and a willingness to design systems that are integrated, equitable, and centred on the needs of the people they are meant to serve,” said Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director at Uniting NSW.ACT’s Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC).

“The success of the Catalyst program demonstrates the effectiveness of non-residential rehabilitation in improving health and social outcomes, and shows what is possible when evidence-based, stigma-free treatment is accessible,” says Adrian Webber, Executive Director, Alcohol and Other Drugs & Wellbeing Services, Uniting Vic.Tas.

UnitingCare Australia welcomed the opportunity to engage with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability, and will continue to advocate for a more compassionate and effective national response.

“If we are serious about improving outcomes, we need a step change in investment, focused on evidence, equity, and compassionate, person-centred care,” Ms Thomas said.

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About UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. Through advocacy and by strengthening service provision, UnitingCare Australia gives voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice.

The UnitingCare Network is the largest network of social service providers in Australia, delivering 5.8 million interactions annually across 1,600 service locations in urban, rural, and remote communities, with over 55,000 staff and 17,000 volunteers.

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