



# Communicating about alcohol and other drug use

The way we talk about alcohol and other drug (AOD) use can have a significant impact on individuals who use AOD, and shape community perceptions. Inaccurate or alarmist portrayals of AOD can cause moral panic and lead to an increase in stigma around these issues.

When done well, communication can reduce stigma and misconceptions, empowering people to seek help. It can also support families and loved ones of those who use AOD, as well as influence policy and funding for AOD services and programs in Australia.

This resource provides some practical tips on how to communicate safely and sensitively.



**Black Dog  
Institute**



**Mindframe**

This resource has been developed by Everymind, under the Mindframe initiative, in partnership with Black Dog Institute and the National Suicide Prevention Trial Sites.



## 1. Framing the conversation

Be sure to convey the adverse health and social consequences associated with AOD use in a balanced and evidence-informed way. This is most effective in reducing or modifying AOD use. It can be helpful to seek expert opinion to provide context and ensure accuracy. Experts can assist with providing context based on facts and statistics to ensure exaggeration doesn't occur. Try to source key informants including researchers, clinicians and people with lived experience of AOD.

## 2. Avoid stigmatising or problematic language and terms

Be mindful of the specific language used to describe people using AOD. Please refer to the table below for examples.

Aim to avoid	Example	Alternative
<p><b>Labelling a person by their AOD use</b></p> <p>Labelling a person by their AOD use can be stigmatising and demoralising. A person is not defined by their alcohol or drug use. It is just one aspect of their life.</p>	<p>Drug user or alcoholic</p>	<p>Instead use person-centred language. For example, 'a person who uses cannabis.'</p>
<p><b>Stigmatising Language</b></p> <p>Stigmatising language can present barriers to seeking help.</p>	<p>Junkie, druggie, drug user, drug abuser</p>	<p>Person who uses or has used alcohol or other drugs.</p>

### 3. Encourage help seeking and support services

When communicating about AOD, highlight the fact that support is available. Add links and details for help-seeking services to your post, and consider the following:

- Adding at least two 24-hour numbers to any story about AOD, including the **National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline** (1800 250 015).
- If the story is online, link directly to online support options.
- Matching the helpline or service to the story or post (e.g., regarding age, audience, location).
- If the service you are including is local, inform them that you are including their details so they can anticipate and better respond to an increase in contacts.

An example of how you could add this information is given below.

*'If you are in need of help or support regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs, there are a range of services available. **The National Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline** (1800 250 015) and **Lifeline** (13 11 14) are both available by phone, 24 hours a day. Other 24/7 options include Lifeline's text message service (0477 13 11 14), and Counselling Online's online service (counsellingonline.org.au).'*

You may also find it easiest to provide help-seeking information through a graphic, such as the one below.

## National Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline: 1800 250 015

### Other 24/7 support services

**Counselling Online:** [counsellingonline.org.au](http://counsellingonline.org.au)

**Family drug support:** 1300 368186

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14 | Text 0477 13 11 14

**Kids Helpline:** 1800 551 800

**Beyond Blue:** 1300 224 636

**Mensline:** 1300 789 978

### Other resources

**Turning Point:** [turningpoint.org.au](http://turningpoint.org.au)

**Alcohol and Drug Foundation:** [adf.org.au](http://adf.org.au)

**Positive Choices:** [positivechoices.org.au](http://positivechoices.org.au)

**Head to Health:** [headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au)

**Headspace:** [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

**ReachOut:** [reachout.com](http://reachout.com)

**QLife:** [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)

**13YARN:** [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)