

Doing community program evaluations well

Using multiple data sources to determine performance and impact of Australia’s Local Drug Action Team program

There are 274 Local Drug Action Teams (LDATs) around Australia. They are funded and supported by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to work with their local communities to deliver evidence-based activities to prevent harms from Alcohol and other drugs (AOD).

Measuring the performance of the LDAT Program is essential to determine whether it benefits the community as intended and identify opportunities for program improvements.

But effective evaluation is challenging, requiring careful planning and the inclusion of multiple sources and perspectives.

The ADFs’ recent LDAT evaluation addressed these challenges to deliver a comprehensive assessment of key support mechanisms and impact on community.

EVALUATION DESIGN

- The LDAT Impact evaluation for the 2020-2022 contract period is based on four objectives:
1. Support communities to build strong partnerships between LDATs, local service providers, government and non-government organisations
 2. Support communities to deliver and evaluate evidence-based activities
 3. Develop and facilitate collaborative learning
 4. Grow the capacity of ADF Relationship Managers (RMs) to support LDATs’ local efforts.

These objectives formed the basis for:

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The evaluation draws on the following data sources.

Evaluation of	Data sources
Program performance	Salesforce CRM records, e.g. number of registered LDATs, number of CAP submissions
Support mechanisms	LDAT and RM surveys
Community impact	Community evaluation reports LDAT interview data

MEASURING IMPACT

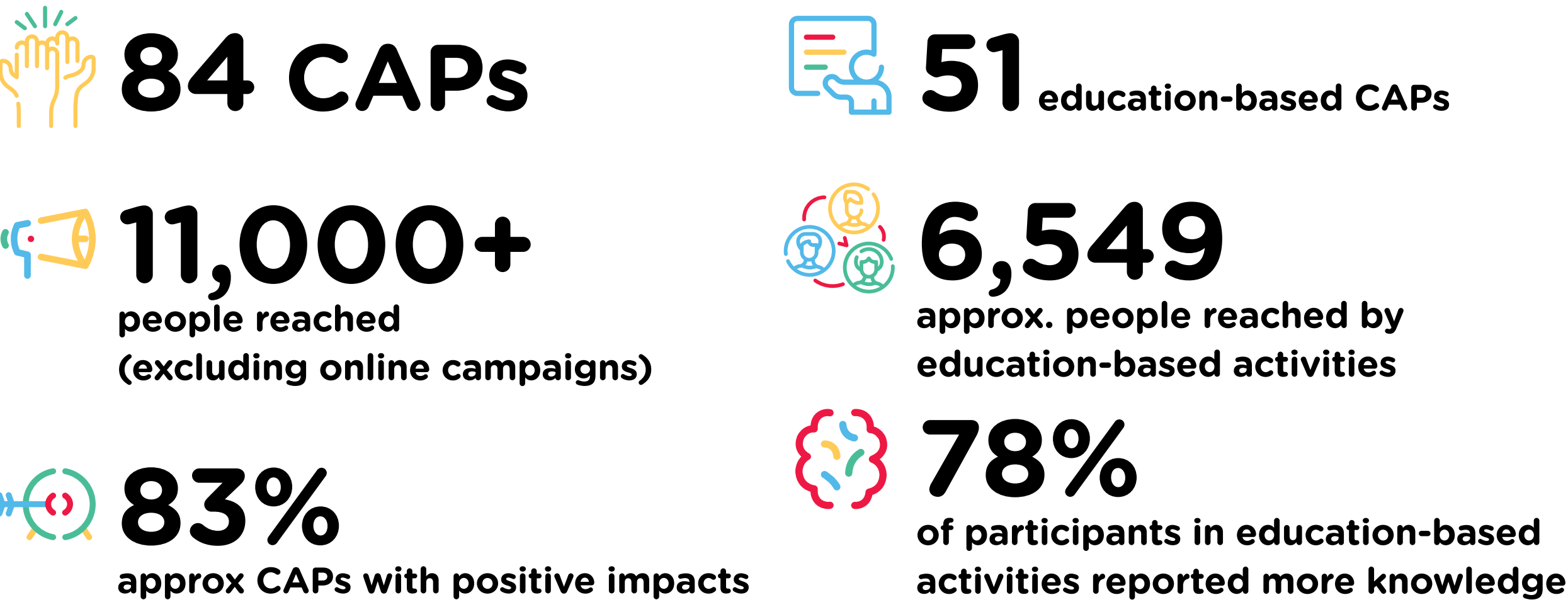
Collection of community impact data: LDATs submit evaluation data for impact measures relating to AOD and protective factors, such as intention to change behaviour, attitudes, and knowledge. These are typically reported quantitatively and assessed against a planned target.

Interview-led case studies: the ADF interviewed select LDATs to understand how they perceive the impact of their activities on community, including factors that facilitated success.

FINDINGS

The majority of LDATs reported positive impacts on their community. For example, approx 78% of people who participated in an education-based activity reported an increase in knowledge.

From February 2020 to July 2021, the ADF analysed a sample of LDAT activities across 84 LDATS:

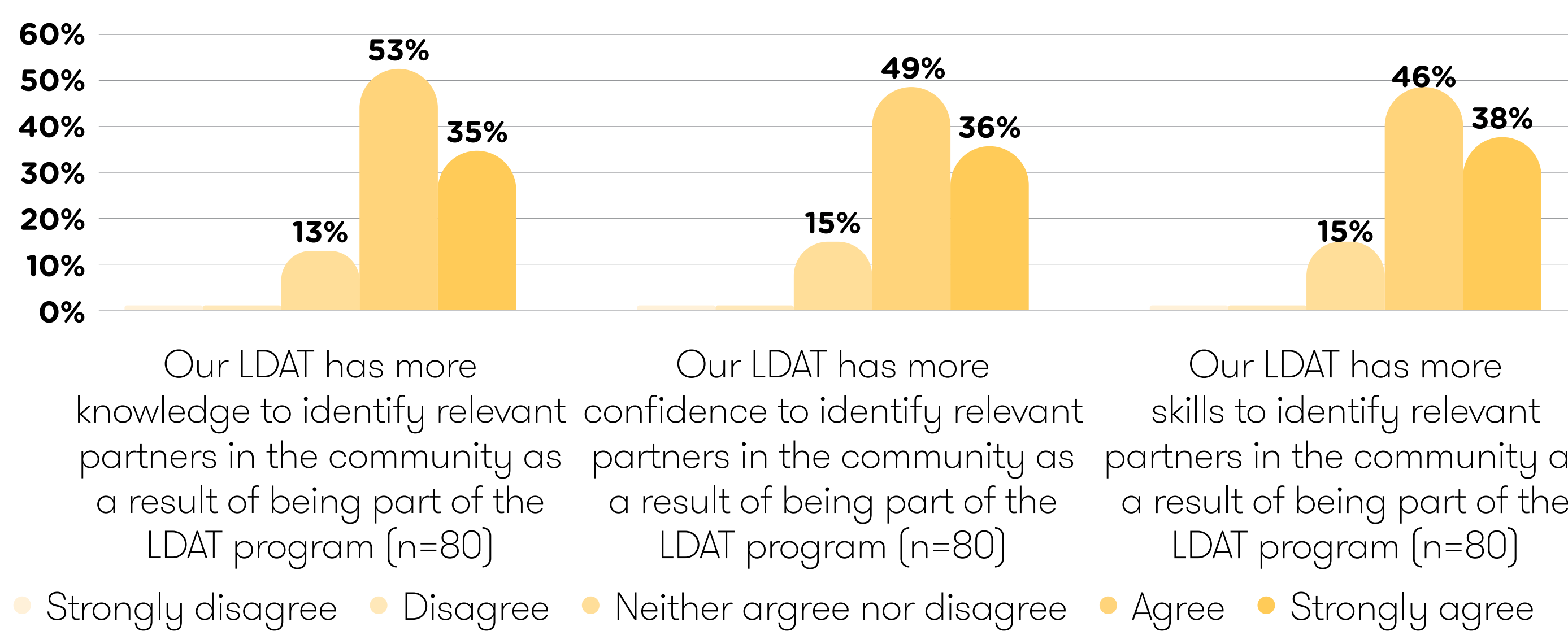


While this is useful data, a more illustrative narrative emerges when additional data, such as qualitative insights on impact, program statistics, and feedback on support mechanisms is incorporated.

Emma J. Beddows¹
¹Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Melbourne, Australia
Email: emma.beddows@adf.org.au
adf.org.au

PARTNERSHIPS

Feedback from LDATs shows that the program is effective at supporting them to build strong partnerships. Program data shows that 97% of LDATs were able to leverage some form of in-kind contribution.



Further insights from the LDAT case studies show that longer-term partnerships and strong collaboration increases the potential for positive community impact.

However, additional feedback from RMs suggests that some LDATs have little experience working closely with their partners, and need support with aligning their goals to their partners’ goals.

These insights reveal that the ADF is successful at supporting LDATs to build partnerships, but more support could be provided for maintaining partnerships, with long-term, collaborative relationships possibly linked to positive community impacts.

By analysing multiple data sources, the evaluation shows us:

- where the program is now
- what the program needs to do in future;
- and why.



DISCUSSION

The collection of impact data is a valuable metric for assessing program outcomes – but does not tell the complete story.

By drawing on multiple data sources, from a variety of perspectives, a holistic analysis is possible.

The ADF approach involved comparing insights:

- across different data formats (such as quantitative and qualitative)
- from different perspectives (including LDATs and RMs)
- from different program stages (from feedback on support resources to community impacts).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The LDAT impact evaluation reveals insights about what the ADF can do to continue supporting LDATs to deliver impacts for their communities, including which support mechanisms benefit them the most and areas where more support is needed.

This was made possible by assessing and comparing multiple sources, including program data, feedback on support mechanisms, and various measures of impact. The benefit of this is that it helps to reveal practical pathways from program design to community impact.

This approach can be used by Not-for-Profit and Non-Government Organisations running similar programs.