

New challenges for alcohol and other drug services in addressing nicotine-related harms

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Introduction: The high prevalence of smoking amongst certain sub-population groups, and the emergence of e-cigarettes as a preferred method for nicotine delivery poses a new and significant challenge for alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) services. ATOD services have a key role to play in the provision of targeted place-based interventions to reduce nicotine-harms.

Methods: Data comes from a unique point-in-time survey undertaken amongst service users of ATOD treatment and harm reduction services in the Australian Capital Territory in 2023. The Service Users' Survey of Outcomes, Satisfaction and Experience (SUSOSE) measured demographics, experience, and outcomes, including in relation to nicotine use. A descriptive analysis examined smoking and vaping among ATOD service users—where relevant, chi-square test for independence tested associations between variables.

Results: Nicotine use among people accessing ATOD services is high: 82% reported being smokers when they first entered or started using the service; 51% reported having used e-cigarettes in the past 12 months; and 46% reported using both tobacco and e-cigarettes. Tobacco use was significantly associated ($p \leq .05$) with not working; being homeless or at risk of homelessness; and having highest level of education at year 11 or below. E-cigarette use was associated with younger age ($p < .001$, $\phi = .345$), one-third of those over 50 years reported e-cigarette use. Findings on smoking behaviours suggest that e-cigarettes may play an important role in quit-attempts and quit-success, as well as in nicotine harm reduction.

Discussions and Conclusions: E-cigarette use appears to be a favoured alternative to tobacco use among people accessing ATOD services—both as a less harmful alternative, and as a smoking cessation device. The findings point to emerging challenges facing ATOD services, and may suggest areas of sector capacity-building to best support best-practice treatment and harm reduction responses to nicotine use in these settings.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): Smoking- and vaping-related harms, impact people who use drugs and access ATOD services. The capacity of ATOD services to provide effective clinical and practical nicotine-dependence harm reduction support is important to improving health and social wellbeing of their service users.

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