

APSU ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Advocacy Kit for APSU Members

5th October 2026

sharc
Self Help Addiction Resource Centre

APSU
ASSOCIATION OF
PARTICIPATING SERVICE USERS

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About this advocacy kit

This advocacy kit supports APSU members to call on candidates for the Victorian Election to commit to sustainable funding for the Association of Participating Service Users (APSU).

Inside this guide, you will find:

- Background on the APSU funding campaign
- Information about advocacy and storytelling
- Guidance on speaking with political candidates and elected representatives
- Practical actions you can take to support the campaign
- A customisable advocacy letter template
- A printable conversation cheat sheet
- Social media resources and campaign materials

Why APSU needs your support

We know that services and systems work better when the people who use them help design them. The Victorian Government increasingly relies on people with lived and living experience (LLE) to help shape effective alcohol and other drug (AOD) policy, services and systems. For more than 25 years, APSU has made this possible.

Over the past two years, demand for APSU services has tripled. APSU's membership of more than 1,000 people is being called upon more than ever before. Yet despite the demand for APSU members' expertise, a funding cut of almost 40 per cent has placed this work at risk.

With current funding, we can no longer meet the demand for our services. To continue providing lived and living experience leadership, APSU needs sustainable funding. We are calling for political parties to commit to:

- Restoration of APSU's operational funding
- A sustainable, long-term funding arrangement for APSU
- Ensuring the infrastructure that supports lived and living experience participation is adequately resourced and funded on an equitable basis with other representative bodies across Victoria.

Why we need APSU members to stand up

Storytelling has been used for centuries to share ideas, create understanding and inspire action.

When people talk about what has helped, what has caused harm, and what needs to change, they provide insights that data alone cannot capture.

By sharing your experiences and speaking directly with decision-makers, candidates and community leaders, you can help:

- Shape public understanding
- Influence policy decisions
- Improve services and systems
- Support meaningful reform

This guide has been developed to help you tell your story, engage with candidates and contribute to a collective call for sustainable funding for APSU.

Building your APSU story

The most effective advocacy stories explain four things:

Story of Self: Why I became involved in APSU

Story of Us: Why APSU matters.

Story of Now: Why action is needed now and what we want political parties to do

The Ask: What we want political parties to do

You do not need to share deeply personal details. What matters most is explaining why you joined APSU and chose to use your lived and living experience to help change the alcohol and other drug system and services.

Below are steps to assist you in framing your own story.

Story of Self: Why I put my hand up

Tell people why you became involved in APSU. Focus on the moment you realised your experiences could help create change, improve services, or support others.

You might talk about

- Wanting to ensure others had a better experience than you did
- Wanting people with lived experience to be listened to
- Wanting to improve services, policies or systems
- Feeling empowered when someone asked for your perspective
- Learning that your experiences could contribute to meaningful change
- Wanting to give back to the community

Questions to consider

- Why did you decide to get involved with APSU?
- Why do you speak up?
- What motivates you to participate?
- What changes do you hope to see?

Example

"I live in the seat of Melbourne, and I have been in recovery from alcohol dependence for nearly 5 years. I am also a member of the Association of Participating Service Users. We are Victoria's alcohol and drug lived and living experience representative body. I want to talk to you about APSU losing nearly 40% of their funding.

For a long time, I struggled with alcohol addiction, and I hadn't been able to work for 10 years. I had no idea what to do and had no one to guide me. The change for me was meeting a peer worker while I was in the emergency department at Monash for a kidney issue. They helped me realise what recovery was possible. Not long after, I went into rehab."

Story of us: Why APSU matters

This is where you explain how APSU turns individual experiences into collective influence.

This is where you describe how APSU enables lived experience voices from across Victoria to come together and be heard.

You might talk about

- APSU connecting people with lived experience
- Opportunities APSU has given you to participate
- Learning from other members
- Why it is important to have an organisation like APSU that provides a platform for a collective voice
- The importance of having an independent lived experience voice

Questions to consider

- What has APSU made possible for you?
- Why is a collective lived experience voice important?
- What would be lost if APSU did not exist?
- Why should decision-makers hear directly from people with lived experience?

Example

"APSU is important because it allows people like me to contribute to something bigger than our individual experiences. APSU brings together more than 1,000 people with lived and living experience across Victoria and supports us to have a voice in decisions that affect our lives and communities.

The training and support APSU provides ensures our expertise is heard when decisions are being made. The training I have received through APSU has helped me gain the confidence to turn one of the worst experiences of my life into something positive. I am proud that my experiences informed the drafting of the Victorian AOD Strategy".

Story of now: Why funding APSU matters

This is where you connect your personal experience with the need for action.

Explain why APSU's future matters, what is at risk, and why decision makers should act now.

You might talk about:

- The opportunities APSU has given you to participate and contribute
- The growing demand for lived and living experience involvement in policy and service design
- The impact APSU has on improving systems and services
- What could be lost if APSU's capacity is reduced

Questions to consider

- Why is APSU worth investing in?
- What has APSU made possible that would otherwise not happen?
- What would be lost if APSU's capacity was reduced?
- Why is now the wrong time to cut funding?

Example

"The work APSU does reaches far beyond any one person. APSU creates opportunities for people with lived and living experience to contribute their expertise and improve the systems that affect our communities. At a time when demand for lived experience participation is growing, reducing APSU's capacity would be a step backwards. In the last two years, APSU has had a 242% increase in engagement opportunities. This demonstrates there is demand for our work. We need decision makers to invest in APSU, so this important work can continue and grow."

The Ask: What we want political parties to do

Ask 1

Immediately restore APSU's operational funding.

Ask 2

Establish a sustainable long-term funding arrangement that reflects APSU's longstanding role as Victoria's AOD lived and living experience representative body.

Ask 3

Ensure alcohol and drug lived and living experience representation is resourced equitably alongside other health sector bodies.

Additional key messages

Below are some additional points that you can weave into your personal story. These are some of the campaign key messages.

There is a mismatch between APSU's role and its funding

The Victorian Government expects APSU to contribute to both alcohol and other drug reform and broader lived and living experience sector reform. Yet APSU's funding does not reflect the critical role it plays in achieving these priorities.

Unlike other representative bodies across the sector that receive sustainable core funding, APSU continues to operate with significantly less security despite performing an equally important representative function.

The recent funding cut puts APSU's work at risk

A recent funding reduction of nearly 40 per cent has significantly reduced APSU's capacity to deliver its core work. Without adequate and sustainable funding, APSU risks having to reduce:

- Community participation opportunities
- Member support
- Training and capability development
- Advocacy and representation
- Policy and systemic reform work

This means fewer opportunities for government, services and decision makers to hear directly from people with lived and living experience. At a time when demand for lived experience participation continues, and APSU's engagement is up 242% in the last two years, APSU cannot afford to have its capacity reduced.

Better lived experience-informed policy leads to better outcomes

When people with lived and living experience help shape policy, programs, and services, governments can make better decisions that reflect our needs and experiences.

Strong alcohol and other drug policy and services

- Save lives
- Reduce harm
- Improve health and wellbeing
- Support recovery and community connection
- Reduce pressure on hospitals, police, prisons, housing and other frontline systems



Investing in lived experience participation is an investment in better policy, better services and better outcomes for the community. Reducing investment in participation moves Victoria further away from the person-centred and evidence-informed approach outlined in the 2025 Victorian AOD Strategy.

Taking action

Changing systems starts with people coming together and speaking up.

Every conversation, social media post, letter, meeting and shared story helps build understanding of why APSU matters and why sustainable funding is needed. You do not need to be an expert advocate to make a difference. Election campaigns create opportunities to speak directly with people seeking to represent your community.

Below are some ideas for where you can share your story.

Places you might meet candidates

- Door knocking campaigns
- Shopping centres
- Railway stations
- Markets
- Community events
- Candidate forums
- Election stalls

Remember, a short personal conversation can be more influential than sharing statistics alone. Offer to send them to the APSU campaign page on the website or say you will send them a letter.

Contact your local MP or candidate

Members of Parliament, political candidates and their staff want to hear from people in their electorate. Personal stories are often the most powerful form of advocacy.

You can

- Call your local Member's office for a conversation
- Request a meeting
- Send a personalised email or letter – see page 10 **Template for sending a personalised letter to a politician or candidate**

You do not need to know all the policy details. Simply sharing why you chose to use your lived and living experience to create change can have a powerful impact.

Join APSU at a meeting with a local member or candidate

You do not have to advocate alone. APSU will provide opportunities for members to join meetings with local Members of Parliament and candidates. These meetings are a chance to:

- Share your experiences directly with decision makers
- Build your advocacy skills
- Learn from other APSU members
- Demonstrate the collective strength of lived and living experience voices
- Help decision makers understand the value of APSU

You can choose the level of involvement that feels right for you. Whether you share your story, ask a question, attend as support, or simply listen and learn, your participation makes a difference.

Share your story on social media

Social media is one of the easiest ways to amplify your voice and help others understand why APSU matters. Effective social media content should be authentic, concise, visually engaging and include a clear call to action. Visual content attracts attention and is more likely to be shared than text alone. Images and videos can significantly increase engagement and reach.

Consider

- Creating a video sharing your Story of Self, Story of Us and Story of Now
  Use our APSU Tip Sheets: **Sharing your story safely**, **Story writing drafting tool** and **Filming a good video**
- Posting campaign updates from SHARC & APSU
- Encouraging others to share the campaign
- A photo with an APSU campaign sign.
  We have created a series of A4 campaign signs featuring key campaign messages. **They are available to download here: APSU Campaign printable cards**
- Use the campaign hashtags and tags when available
  - **Main tag (always use): #FundAPSU2026**

  #InvestInAPSU #FundAPSU #FundLivedExperience #SupportAPSU
  #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs #FundAPSUSaveLives

You do not need professional equipment. Authentic stories are often the most effective. A simple photo or video holding a sign can help raise awareness and start conversations.

Invite family and friends to support the campaign

People do not need lived and living experience expertise themselves to support the campaign.

Talk to

- Family members
- Friends
- Colleagues
- Community members
- Service providers
- Allies and supporters

Ask them to learn more about the campaign and support APSU's work.

Sign and share the public letter

APSU will soon release a public letter calling for sustainable funding and recognition of APSU's role.

When available

- Sign the letter yourself
- Share it through your networks
- Encourage family and friends to sign
- Post it on social media
- Include it in community newsletters and groups

Every signature helps demonstrate the breadth of support for APSU and lived and living experience leadership.

Every action matters

Not everyone will want to speak at a meeting or share their story publicly. That's okay. Some people will write letters. Others will post on social media. Some will attend meetings, gather signatures, speak to candidates, or encourage others to get involved. The important thing is finding a way to use your voice that feels right for you.

Resources

Quick reference campaign messages

Consider using some of the campaign messages alongside your story for greater impact.

- APSU has been the AOD lived experience representative body for more than 25 years.
- APSU represents a membership of more than 1,000 Victorians.
- Demand for APSU participation has grown significantly/by 242 per cent in the last two years
- APSU recently lost almost 40% of its government funding.
- Government expectations of APSU continue to grow.
- APSU's funding does not reflect the role it is required to play.
- Better lived experience participation leads to better policy, better services and better outcomes. It also saves lives and saves taxpayers' money.

It is important that we have a consistent ask across the campaign. APSU is seeking

Ask 1

Immediately restore APSU's operational funding.

Ask 2

Establish a sustainable long-term funding arrangement that reflects APSU's longstanding role as Victoria's AOD lived and living experience representative body.

Ask 3

Ensure alcohol and drug lived and living experience representation is resourced equitably alongside other health sector bodies.

Campaign slogans

You can use the following slogans as your email headings and via your socials

- 40% Cut. 100% essential.
- Fund APSU Save Lives
- Better policy saves money. Better services save lives

These slogans are available to print out at home. Hold them up for social media posts. **They are available to download here: APSU Campaign printable cards**

Story writing drafting tool

Once you have identified the candidates you want to contact, you need to draft your personal story that you are going to share as part of your advocacy. This drafting tool will assist. It's a good idea to practice with a friend.

My Story of self

- I reside in the seat of [name seat]
- I have experience of [advise on relevant AOD Lived and living experience]
- I became involved with APSU because...

My story of us

- Why APSU matters to you and your community

My story of now

- Why lived and living experience leadership matters
- What will be lost if APSU's capacity is reduced

What you want the political party to do:

- Ask 1

  Immediately restore APSU's operational funding.

- Ask 2

  Establish a sustainable long-term funding arrangement that reflects APSU's longstanding role as Victoria's AOD lived and living experience representative body.

- Ask 3

  Ensure alcohol and drug lived and living experience representation is resourced equitably alongside other health sector bodies.

You can download our APSU Tip Sheets: **Story writing drafting tool**, **Sharing your story safely**

Victorian state election 2026 candidate tracker

You can use the Election Tracker resource to identify:

- Candidates in your electorate
- Political party affiliation

- Independent candidates
- Contact details where available

Template for writing a personalised letter to a politician or candidate

Use this template to write to your local member or candidate and Minister Stitts, the Victorian Health Minister.

This is also available as a separate APSU Tip Sheet: **Template for writing a personalised letter**

> SUBJECT: Urgent Support Needed: Restore Funding for Victoria's AOD Lived Experience Representative Body (APSU)
>
> TO: [Name of State MP / Minister for Mental Health / Government Recipient]

Dear [Recipient Name / Member for Electorate/Candidate]

I am writing to you as a constituent in your electorate of [Insert Electorate Name] to raise an urgent matter regarding Victoria's alcohol and other drug (AOD) system.

> **[PERSONALISATION PROMPT 1 — Choose the option that best describes your personal lived experience]**
>
> • Option A (Consumer): As someone who has accessed or tried to access alcohol and other drug services in Victoria...
>
> • Option B (Family Member / Supporter): As a family member or supporter of someone who has navigated Victoria's AOD system...
>
> • Option C (Community Advocate): As a community advocate supporting the Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) and the Association of Participating Service Users (APSU)...

> **[PERSONALISATION PROMPT 2 — Your Personal Lived Experience]**
>
> Insert 2–3 sentences reflecting your personal lived experience. Describe how directly navigating the system gave you insight into what works and what needs to change, or how APSU enabled you to turn that experience into systemic advice.
>
> Example: "Directly navigating the AOD system showed me firsthand where services support people well and where gaps exist. Through APSU, I was able to access the training and platform needed to contribute constructive, lived experience expertise back into health service design."

This financial year, the Association of Participating Service Users (APSU)—a program of SHARC—lost almost 40% of its Victorian government funding. This cut puts at risk the vital participation infrastructure that APSU has delivered for over 25 years.

While the Victorian Government relies on people with lived and living experience to deliver on its 2025 AOD Strategy reform commitments, it has slashed funding for the organisation that makes participation possible. APSU's membership of over 1,000 community members contributes across government and services, and engagement opportunities tripled in the 2024–25 financial year alone.

Unlike other representative bodies across the sector that receive sustainable core funding, APSU continues to operate with significantly less security despite performing an equally important representative function.

> **[PERSONALISATION PROMPT 3 — Impact of Losing APSU Support]**
>
> Insert 1–2 sentences on what losing APSU's support would mean for you and/or consumers, family members, supporters, or the broader community.
>
> Example: "Without APSU's infrastructure and training, consumers, family members, and supporters will lose the structured support needed to inform state policy, leaving alcohol and other drug decisions disconnected from the realities of people who use them."

Lived and living experience is not an optional perspective; it is essential expertise—and good policy depends on it. When alcohol and other drug services are designed alongside the consumers, family members, and supporters who rely on them, health responses become more effective—saving lives and reducing pressure on hospitals, police, prisons, and housing. Better policy saves both lives and taxpayer dollars.

I urge your party to make a pre-election promise to:

Immediately restore APSU's operational funding.

- Establish a sustainable long-term funding arrangement that reflects APSU's longstanding role as Victoria's AOD lived and living experience representative body.
- Ensure alcohol and drug lived and living experience representation is resourced equitably alongside other health sector bodies.
- Please reply in writing to confirm what steps you will take to support APSU and ensure lived and living experience voices remain central to Victorian AOD policy.

Yours sincerely

[Your Name]
[Your Suburb / Postcode]
[Your Phone / Email]

APSU Campaign Cheat Sheet

Print or save this quick reference guide when meeting or speaking with politicians. Keep it near the door so you are ready if a political party knocks. Keep it in your handbag in case your local member is at your train station or at the local supermarket.

This is also available for download APSU Tip Sheet: **APSU Campaign Cheat Sheet**

1. Who You Are & Local Connection (10 Seconds)

- "Hi, I'm a constituent living in [Suburb] in the electorate of [Electorate]."
- "I'm speaking with you as someone with lived and living experience of alcohol and other drug service use and as a member of the Association of Participating Service Users (APSU)."

2. Why This Matters to Me (20 Seconds)

Mention something personal that links you to APSU so the person understands why APSU is important to you and the broader community. :

- "APSU has given me the opportunity to use my lived experience to help improve services and systems for others."
- "Through APSU I've been able to contribute my expertise and have a voice in decisions that affect people and communities."
- "APSU helps ensure people with lived and living experience are heard when policies and services are being designed."
- "Without APSU, many people would lose opportunities to participate safely and meaningfully in system reform."

3. The Core Issue (20 Seconds)

- "The Victorian Government relies on lived and living experience expertise to shape alcohol and other drug policy, services and reform."
- "At the same time, APSU has recently lost almost 40% of its funding, placing its future capacity at risk."
- "For more than 25 years, APSU has supported lived and living experience leadership and representation across Victoria."
- "Demand for APSU's participation work has continued to grow, yet funding has been reduced."

4. Why It Matters (20 Seconds)

- "Lived and living experience isn't an optional perspective. It is essential expertise."
- "Services and policies work better when they are designed with the people they affect."
- "APSU brings together more than 1,000 Victorians with lived and living experience and supports our collective voice."
- "If APSU's capacity is reduced, opportunities for people with lived and living experience to contribute will also be reduced."

5. The 3 Campaign Asks

Ask 1

Immediately restore APSU's operational funding.

Ask 2

Establish a sustainable long-term funding arrangement that reflects APSU's longstanding role as Victoria's AOD lived and living experience representative body.

Ask 3

Ensure alcohol and drug lived and living experience representation is resourced equitably alongside other health sector bodies.

6. Finish with a Commitment

- "Can I ask whether you support these requests?"
- "Can your office provide a written response outlining your position?"
- "Would you be willing to learn more about APSU's work and the importance of lived and living experience leadership?"

Resources available to Share and Download

APSU Campaign Printable Cards

APSU Campaign Cheat Sheet

APSU Tip Sheet-Filming a good video

APSU Tip Sheet-Sharing your story safely

APSU Tip Sheet-Story writing drafting tool

APSU Tip Sheet-Template for writing a personalised letter