

# Open Letter Calling for the Restoration of APSU Funding

We, the undersigned organisations, services, researchers, community leaders and individuals, are deeply concerned by the recent reduction in funding to the Association of Participating Service Users (APSU), a program of Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC).

For more than 25 years, APSU has operated as Victoria's alcohol and other drug (AOD) lived and living experience representative body. APSU provides the infrastructure, training and support that enable people with experience of AOD use and recovery and their families and supporters to contribute their expertise to policy development, research, service design and system reform.

The Victorian Government already relies on APSU. APSU members and staff contribute to government committees, advisory groups, expert forums, consultations, research and service design activities across the AOD sector and beyond. APSU is increasingly performing the functions of a peak body and providing the infrastructure that makes lived and living experience participation possible.

APSU has demonstrated its ability to deliver on these responsibilities. Over the past two years, APSU's activity and membership have tripled, growing to more than 1,000 members who contribute expertise across government, systems, research, services and the community. This growth has occurred alongside significant government investment in AOD reform and increasing demand for lived and living experience participation.

Despite this success, APSU continues to operate without sustainable funding that allows for strategic growth. The Department of Health has long recognised APSU's growing role and has engaged APSU and SHARC in discussions about the structures and support required to fulfil its representative and leadership functions. Yet APSU has experienced a funding reduction of almost 40 per cent this financial year.

This funding cut comes at exactly the wrong time. A key principle of the Victorian AOD Strategy, launched in December 2025, is to embed and include lived and living experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of policy, services and reform. APSU is central to making this commitment a reality. Reducing investment in APSU weakens the very infrastructure that enables lived and living experience participation at a time when government has committed to strengthening it.

Lived and living experience is not an optional perspective. It is essential expertise, and good policy depends on it. Better AOD policy and services are possible when solutions are designed by and with the people they are for, and the families and supporters who help navigate the system.

We, the undersigned organisations and individuals, call on all Victorian political parties to commit 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 the infrastructure that supports lived and living experience participation is adequately resourced and funded on an equitable basis with other representative bodies across Victoria.

We urge political parties to act now to protect this essential function and ensure lived and living experience voices remain central to shaping a more effective, responsive and person-centred alcohol and other drug system for all Victorians.

***The undersigned organisations and individuals***

ACCESS Health & Community

Alcohol Change Vic

ADF Alcohol and Drug Foundation

Bendigo Community Health Services

Beyond Sticky Notes

Burnet reach for the many

capr centre for alcohol policy research

cohealth care for all

ermha 365



FIRSTSTEP

Girraway Ganyi CONSULTANCY

HACSU Health & Community Services Union

HARM REDUCTION VICTORIA

Lived Experience Training (.org) learn, embed, transform!

MentalHealth Victoria

Nexus Integrated Care

Odyssey Victoria

omnia Community Health

PENINGTON INSTITUTE

switchboard

tandem

thorne harbour health

Turning Point TREATMENT · RESEARCH · EDUCATION

Uniting

VMIAC by and for consumers

vaada Victorian Alcohol & Drug Association

VACRO

WHOS® helping people help themselves

WINDANA Life. Changing.

youth projects

your COMMUNITY HEALTH

YSAS YOUTH SUPPORT + ADVOCACY SERVICE

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY | DEAKIN CENTRE FOR RELATIONSHIPS, TRAUMA, ADDICTION & AGGRESSION

NAS RECOVERY CENTRE COLLECTIVE HEALING

**A/ Prof Melissa Petrakis**

**Anna Sowden**

**Cath Peake**

**Dr Ariel Roxburgh**

**Dr Elle Coleman**

**Gareth Edwards**

**Kent Burgess**

**Professor Robyn Martin**

**Professor Petra Staiger**

**Tegan Lobb**