



Alcohol, Tobacco and other  
Drugs Council Tasmania Inc.

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Measures must be put in place to reduce drink driving in Tasmania.

Today, the heartbroken family and friends of a teenage girl killed by a drunk learner driver pleaded for others to learn from their tragedy.

It seems that issues around drink driving and the harm it causes our community has reached a point where pleading seems the only solution.

Tasmanians consume alcohol at levels above the national average with 76.2 per cent of Tasmanians between the age of 18 and 24 drinking at levels that exceed national guidelines for safe drinking.

The Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council chief executive Alison Lai said she believes that more needs to be done to address the Tasmania's issue of drinking while driving, and believes that our court system is a critical part of finding a solution.

"We know that there are thousands of Tasmanians charged with drink driving every year but our approach to dealing with this issue is limited to fines, losing their licence or time in jail," Ms Lai said.

"There is currently no other options for those charged with drink-driving offences and when we know that repeat drink drivers are responsible for a significant portion of drink-driving crashes on Tasmanian roads, we need to consider another approach."

"We know there are treatment options that work to change people's risky behaviour. We know that this can take pressure off overcrowding in our hospitals and prisons."

One approach supported by the ATDC is the expansion of Tasmania's existing court-mandated diversion program already available for people charged with illicit drug offences, to include alcohol related offences.

"This is not an approach that would be appropriate for offenders like Mr Sward whose actions have resulted in the loss of life but for other offenders expanding our existing program would allow magistrates the option of non-custodial sentences for Tasmanians who are charged with drink-driving offences," she said.

"It's a program that is currently used in Tasmania for people charged with illicit drug offences, and those individuals participate in drug treatment programs instead of going to jail.

"It is an approach that has been proven to be highly successful in both reducing offending and drug use and improving people's health and well-being."



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While this approach would not have avoided the tragic loss of Brianna Whittington, the way Tasmanian currently deals with drink driving offences needs a rethink, including what happens to those that receive jail sentences. “In relation to examples like that of Mr Sward, it’s our understanding that when he has served his sentence and released back into the community, he will be eligible to regain his licence but during his time in jail our current system would not have required him, or others convicted of serious offences related to alcohol to undertake any education or treatment,” she said.

“This is something that needs to be looked at.”

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**Who are the ATDC?** The Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council is the peak body representing the interests of the community sector organisations that provide services to people with substance use issues in Tasmania. A membership-based, independent organisation, the ATDC advocates for adequate support and funding for the delivery of evidence-based alcohol, tobacco and other drug initiatives.