

## **Heroin overdose prevention campaign – an overview**

### **Background**

Based on a reduced but steady rate of fatal heroin overdose following the heroin glut in 2000, the Victorian government is initiating a campaign to reduce fatal and non-fatal heroin related overdose.

To do this, the Department of Human Services has developed a range of messages aimed at heroin users to increase knowledge and awareness of overdose risks associated with heroin use and increase users knowledge of ways to reduce the risks.

### **The objectives**

The aim of the campaign is to increase knowledge and awareness around the behaviours that increase users' risk of overdose. It also aims to increase knowledge and awareness of strategies that users can adopt to reduce the risk of overdose

The messages have been developed in four key risk areas – purity, tolerance, drug half-life and using alone. The suite of materials also promotes access to treatment.

These messages target people who use heroin and are designed to communicate safer ways of using heroin.

### **The process**

In 2004 DHS led consultations with key stakeholders in the alcohol and drug field and in particular, needle and syringe programs. These included Turning Point, VIVAIDS, Metropolitan Ambulance Service, Foot Patrol, Melbourne Inner Needle Exchange (MINE), DAS West Mobile Overdose Response Service and the North Richmond Community Health Centre.

Following the development of messages in consultations, they were tested through four focus groups with users.

- Inner City primary health service (Living Room) - Melbourne
- Melbourne Inner Needle Exchange (MINE) – Smith Street Collingwood
- Health Works – Footscray
- Western Drug and Alcohol Service - Footscray

The focus groups were used to ensure the relevance of messages with users and to inform the way in which the messages should be delivered.

### **Implementation**

The messages have been developed as posters, wallet cards and stickers to be distributed through NSPs, primary health services and the general alcohol and drug sector over a five-month period.

### **Evaluation**

The campaign is being evaluated through a total of 10 NSPs.

Benchmark data have been gathered prior to the dissemination of the materials to assess users' current levels of knowledge and awareness. Ongoing evaluation will continue as the campaign rolls out.

### **Further information**

For further information or resources, call Richard Adezio on (03) 9637 4895 or email [richard.adezio@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:richard.adezio@dhs.vic.gov.au).