

Victorian Government Response to the Proposed Medically Supervised Injecting Service trial consultation: City of Melbourne (2023)

In July 2020 the Victorian Government appointed former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Ken Lay AO, APM to lead an independent consultation on the establishment of a second supervised injecting service.

The Victorian Government welcomes the *Proposed Medically Supervised Injecting Service trial consultation: City of Melbourne (2023)* report (the Report) from Mr Ken Lay and commends the extensive research and community consultation undertaken. The Report's findings and recommendations are of great value to government in its ongoing efforts to reduce the harms associated with drug use in Victoria.

The Report identified that heroin-related harms in the City of Melbourne had returned to pre-COVID levels and drug use is affecting community safety and amenity. Perceptions and experiences of safety and amenity are complicated by the interplay of stigma and discrimination against people perceived to be using drugs. Widespread concerns about safety and amenity alongside widespread acknowledgment for an enhanced service response to minimise AOD harms suggests broader consideration of community health, wellbeing and safety is needed when implementing policy responses to address AOD harms.

The Victorian Government is committed to preventing and reducing drug related harm in the Victorian community. Our investment in alcohol and other drug treatment, prevention, and harm reduction services total \$372 million each financial year to support these essential services. Investment in Victoria's alcohol and drug services has more than doubled since 2014-15, and we've made significant progress – like our North Richmond Medically Supervised Injecting Service, and our new health-led response to public intoxication. However, drug use harms continue to evolve, and we recognise the need to diversify our response to meet community need.

The Victorian Government will not progress the trial of supervised injecting service, recognising the need for a broader framework of support - delivering health and social services targeted to people who use drugs and addressing drug related harms including fatal overdose across Victoria through:

Actions to address injecting drug harms in the City of Melbourne

We will take immediate action to deliver on evidence-based harm reduction initiatives, addressing key recommendations of the Report including:

- Establishing a new CBD Community Health Hub, integrating critical harm reduction services with care coordination and enhanced outreach services, providing opportunities for people who use drugs to improve their health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Empowering local stakeholders and community through the establishment of a CBD reference group, to consider safety and amenity concerns at a local level.
- Establishing a Victorian first hydromorphone trial, diverting people from the illicit drug market and diversifying treatment options.

Government is committed to address the issues identified in the report and recognises the need to deliver on a statewide response to address drug related harms – we know these challenges are not unique to the City of Melbourne.

A comprehensive statewide response to address drug related harm

Preventing and reducing drug related harms in Victoria is a key role of the Alcohol and other Drug service system. Our commitment is to ensure the system is equipped to meet the needs of the community through addressing known gaps and increasing connection and integration. The Victorian Government will deliver a statewide AOD Strategy providing a shared vision and pathway forward so the system can continue to deliver better community outcomes. This work will be supported by the implementation of a Chief Addiction Advisor and standing Ministerial Advisory Council within the Department of Health to strengthen oversight and deliver expert advice on system priorities.

Most Victorians who use alcohol and drugs do not experience significant problems, but for those that do the consequences can be dire. Drug harms, including fatal overdose, are felt similarly across the state. The response to this report will deliver a statewide overdose prevention and response efforts to deliver on:

- Increased access to opioid pharmacotherapy in community health services, addressing prescriber shortages and delivering on reforms to ensure sustained access to opioid pharmacotherapy in Victoria.
- A statewide overdose prevention and response helpline through a peer response; and
- round the clock access to the lifesaving naloxone medication, enabling rapid responses to adverse events in the community.