



Secretary

Department of Health & Human Services

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.dhhs.vic.gov.au
DX 210081



e3965143

Dr Josh Munro
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Dr Munro

RE: Coroner's findings into the death of Mr Brian Rutherford (without inquest)
Court Reference: COR 2014 006057

Thank you for your letter of 8 September 2015 enclosing the findings described above.

The Department of Health and Human Services acknowledges the tragic death of Mr Brian Rutherford who died as a result of a fall from a ladder at home.

I refer to the Coroner's recommendations in this matter:

1. *"that the Department of Health and Human Services develops and coordinates a strategy and/or program with relevant stakeholders with the aim of implementing public health and safety measures targeted at preventing deaths from ladder falls", and*
2. *"that the Department of Health and Human Services commence this strategy and/or program through a public education program including but not limited to the production and dissemination of safety information material such as pamphlets aimed at improving the public's awareness of the risks and dangers of domestic ladder use."*

The department's response: The Coroner's recommendations are being implemented.

The department is aware of the increasing trend of fatalities and hospitalisations associated with ladder falls, and that approximately seven Victorians die each year as a result of injuries sustained in a domestic ladder fall. The department acknowledges that recent cases of ladder fall deaths demonstrate the need for a coordinated domestic ladder falls prevention strategy.

As noted in the department's previous response to the Coroner's report on the death of Mr Zammit (Coroners Reference COR 2014 3728), the department commissioned Monash University Injury Research Institute in 2014 to investigate ladder falls injury and opportunities for prevention, which culminated in the report entitled *Reduction of Major Trauma and Injury from Domestic Ladder Falls*. The report is published on the department's Victorian State Trauma System website, and identified that a significant reduction in domestic ladder falls requires a coordinated and multi-disciplinary approach, including a strong prevention focus through a public health message.

The report also identified a range of evidence-based opportunities for reducing ladder falls, such as changes to Australian Standards, ladder design improvements, building design requirements and the promotion of alternative options to domestic ladder use. These opportunities require attention from a number of government agencies, enabling a system-wide approach to this preventable issue.

Since the report, the department is collaborating with the Queensland Department of Fair Trading, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and Consumer Affairs Victoria in the development of a national public education campaign to raise awareness of the dangers associated with using a ladder (especially among men over 60 years of age). Over time, it is anticipated that domestic ladder falls injuries will reduce due to behavioural changes in the community. The campaign is a two year interstate collaboration that began in July 2015.

Standards Australia has also commenced a review of the *Australia New Zealand Portable Ladder Standard*. A review steering committee is currently being established. The department advocated for health sector representation and NSW Health and the department will collaborate on health department involvement.

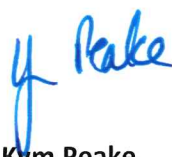
To support the above mentioned activities, the department has formed an intra-departmental ladder falls prevention working group. This working group will also liaise with relevant Victorian stakeholders for this issue, e.g. Worksafe Victoria, Consumer Affairs Victoria.

In addition to the above, the Victorian Government advocates for falls prevention through Seniors Health Promotion activities, including the funding of healthy ageing advisers, workforce development strategies, and the *Victorian Active Ageing Partnership* which promotes health and wellbeing for older people. Community awareness messages about the dangers of ladder falls have already been promoted via *Seniors Online* and the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.

Members of the department's ladder falls prevention working group met with the Coroners Court of Victoria Prevention Unit on 21 October 2015 to discuss a proactive and strategic response to the Coroners' reports, and to identify possible joint activity toward the prevention of ladder falls injury and deaths. The department looks forward to continuing work with the Coroners Court of Victoria to progress this important issue.

If you require further information please contact Denise Laughlin, Acting Senior Public Health Advisor, Population Health and Prevention Strategy, on telephone 9096 1048 or email denise.laughlin@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Kym Peake

Secretary

4 December, 2015