

Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

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Coroner Jacqui Hawkins
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
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Dear Coroner Hawkins

Thank you for the letter of 20 February 2017 which included a copy of your findings in relation to the death of Ms A (Coroners reference: COR 2016 002418). In line with my obligations under the *Coroners Act 2008*, I am responding to the recommendations made to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Can I first extend my sympathy to the family and friends of Ms A and the families and friends of the 456 other Victorians who were lost to overdose in 2016. This is a sombre reminder of the dangers of addiction and the need to continue efforts to prevent fatal overdoses from occurring.

The Victorian Government is committed to reducing the harm caused by drug use across the State, including in areas like the City of Yarra. As part of this continued commitment, the government announced a new \$1.3 million package of additional harm reduction initiatives in February 2017.

This included \$350,000 to subsidise the cost of naloxone and increase training of family members, friends and front line workers in the City of Yarra and across the state. These funds will ensure the availability of naloxone is expanded to people who are in a position to intervene and reverse opioid drug overdoses, in line with your recommendation.

Importantly, the package also included other new investments targeted towards reducing the risk of fatal overdose both in the City of Yarra and other parts of the state:

- \$850,000 has been allocated to trial a new overdose response service in the City of Yarra and some other local government areas. Evidence shows that people like Ms A who have previously survived an overdose are at greater risk of future fatal overdose. This new investment will aim to prevent this occurring by establishing a new service response that will seek to connect with people who have survived overdose and support them to seek health and support services to manage their addiction and related problems.
- \$100,000 to expand overdose prevention education. There are some behaviours that can increase the risk of fatal overdose, and this education campaign will inform

injecting drug users in the City of Yarra and other locations across the state about how to avoid those risks.

The Department of Health and Human Services has been working with key sector partners to support the design and roll out of the additional investments to ensure that they build on existing local strategies and investments and are appropriately targeted.

You also recommended a review of current department-funded services that support the health and wellbeing of injecting drug users in the City of Yarra, with the review to be taken forward in consultation with relevant service providers and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to improve injecting drug users' access to and engagement with those services. This review will commence in early 2017-18. The attached document provides a standalone response to the two recommendations.


Across Victoria, the government has continued to grow the overall investment in alcohol and drug harm reduction and treatment. In the past three state budgets, the government has increased state-wide funding for alcohol and drug services by 28 per cent, from \$165.1 million in 2014/15 to \$211.7 million in 2017-18.

The recent State Budget included funding of \$12.4 million for additional drug workers to support people entering and exiting drug treatment who are at higher risk of overdose, as well as significant increases in funding for community based treatment services, residential rehabilitation and Aboriginal specific services.

These activities will build on the existing mix of drug harm reduction and treatment responses already funded across the state, and will help reduce the overall harm caused by drug misuse to drug users, their families, their friends and their local communities and services. This comprehensive approach recognises that, across the state, those impacts are felt in many communities.

Should you require any further information regarding the responses to your recommendations, please contact Judith Abbott, Director - Community Based Health Policy and Programs on 9096 5238, or email Judith.Abbott@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely


Kym Peake
Secretary

21/5/2017

Encl.

Encl. Department of Health and Human Services' response to the Coroner's Findings into the death of Ms A (Coroners Court of Victoria reference: COR 2016 002418)

Recommendations addressed to the Department of Health and Human Services:

Recommendation:

Ms Kym Peake, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services take the necessary steps to expand the availability of naloxone to people who are in a position to intervene and reverse opioid drug overdoses in the City of Yarra.

Department's response: Accepted.

On 23 February 2017, the Minister for Mental Health, Martin Foley MP, announced an additional \$1.3 million to help reduce drug related harm and fatal overdoses across Victoria.

This funding will support a range of harm reduction measures, including expanding the availability of Naloxone for service providers both in the City of Yarra and across the rest of Victoria. This will be achieved by subsidising the cost of Naloxone, with establishment of referral pathways involve General Practitioners and pharmacists at a local level to improve access to Naloxone.

Funding will also be available for alcohol and other drug service providers across Victoria to provide training for families, friends and front line workers on how to safely use Naloxone to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, and how to connect individuals who have experienced overdose with drug and alcohol treatment services.

The department hosted a co-design workshop on 21 March 2017 with key sector representatives, including those from the City of Yarra, to help design this initiative to ensure it meets community needs.

Recommendation:

Ms Kym Peake, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services review current department-funded services that support the health and wellbeing of injecting drug users in the City of Yarra, and consult with relevant service providers and other stakeholders, to identify opportunities to improve injecting drug users' access to and engagement with these life-saving services.

Department's response: Accepted.

The Department will conduct a review of services for injecting drug users in the City of Yarra in 2017-18.

This will involve close consultation with relevant service providers, consumers, peers and other stakeholders and inform future prioritisation of department-funded services for drug users.