



## Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

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BAC-4462

Ms Mikaela Meggetto  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh Street  
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Ms Meggetto

Thank you for your letter of 15 October 2019 including Coroner Audrey Jamieson's findings regarding the fatal overdose on 22 December 2017 of Phillip James King (Coroners reference: COR 2017 006443). In line with my obligations under the *Coroners Act 2008*, I am responding to the Coroner's recommendations addressed to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (the department).

I note that Mr King's death was found to be the result of an intentional overdose of prescription medicine with the intent to end his life. I also note the Coroner's concern regarding Mr King's dependence on and misuse of his medicines and whether the many medicines prescribed to him were truly required to treat his pain effectively.

I accept the recommendations provided in your report. The department will address your recommendations through a range of initiatives and enhancements to drug services, this includes the implementation of SafeScript – the first real-time prescription monitoring system of its kind in Australia. Its use will be mandatory for prescribers and pharmacists from April 2020 and implementation activity includes a public awareness campaign and a clinician education program to highlight the harms associated with certain high-risk prescription medicines, including opioids.

In relation to family and partner awareness of opioid risks, the department will consult with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and a range of other relevant bodies to consider opportunities to deliver training and education for families and carers in risks, signs and symptoms of appropriate opioid responses. This aligns with our ongoing work to increase the availability of the life-saving drug naloxone.

In relation to the drug pregabalin, the department has assessed a review undertaken by the SafeScript Expert Advisory Group in early 2019 to determine significant evidence of harm associated with medicines not monitored in SafeScript at that time. Pregabalin was among the medicines reviewed. The department is satisfied with the finding from the review that the scale of harm of pregabalin was proportionate to its supply, and was not at the same level compared to medicines already monitored in SafeScript, therefore pregabalin was not listed in scope for the program.

On the recommendation of the SafeScript Expert Advisory Group, the department has written to the Therapeutic Goods Administration highlighting the need for national regulatory measures to promote the safe prescribing of pregabalin. On behalf of the SafeScript Expert Advisory Group the department has listed pregabalin for monitoring of any new compelling evidence of harm. The department will reconsider the decision to not list pregabalin on SafeScript if there is any evidence of harm found through this monitoring.

As you may be aware, the Commonwealth government has committed funding for a national education program for general practitioners on the risk, signs and symptoms and interventions for overdose, including the use of naloxone. The department will continue to monitor the outcomes of this work through its close engagement with our jurisdictional colleagues through governance arrangements established under the National Drug Strategy.

The department remains committed to addressing the concerning trend of increased misuse of prescription opioids in combination with other medications, and the related deaths in Victoria. We will work strategically across the health system to minimise harm from polydrug use and provide the loved ones of people who use drugs with the knowledge and tools needed to keep them safe.

Yours sincerely



**Kym Peake**

Secretary

22 / 1 / 2020