



Department of Health and Human Services

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Marde Bevan
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006
Via email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Bevan

Court reference: COR 2016 006058

Thank you for your letter of 03 February 2020 regarding Coroner Darren Bracken's recommendation and findings on the death of Gemma Loryn Redding.

The Department of Health and Human Services' (the department) response to the recommendation in the Coroner's report is as follows:

Recommendation:

That the Department of Health and Human Services consider expanding its heroin focussed overdose education and naloxone programs to those, including immediate family members prescribed strong opioids such as methadone, physeptone and similar drugs and their families.

The department's response:

Methadone and other opioids are prescription medications used for a range of legitimate indications including pain relief and opioid replacement therapy. Opioids are subject to misuse and are associated with the risk of unintentional overdose. This risk is compounded when opioids are taken in combination with other drugs. The department acknowledges a rise in overdose related harm from the use of illicit and prescription drugs and agrees with the Coroner's recommendation.

The Coroner's Prevention Unit has identified prevention opportunities through overdose response education and expansion of naloxone programs. The department is committed to reducing the harms associated with opioid overdose and accordingly the following initiatives have or will be implemented.

Victoria introduced the mandatory use of SafeScript for clinicians in April 2020 when prescribing or dispensing a monitored drug. SafeScript is Australia's first real-time

prescription monitoring system and provides a tool for clinicians to identify and begin the conversation with people about the risks of taking certain combinations of prescription medications.

SafeScript implementation has included a public awareness campaign and clinician education program to highlight the harms associated with certain high-risk prescription medicines, including opioids.

Naloxone is a critical intervention in reversing opioid overdose. Victoria's needle and syringe program provides opioid overdose education and naloxone training to people who may be at risk of overdose. After completing the training naloxone can be accessed for free through the Naloxone Subsidy Initiative by exchanging a voucher for the medication at a pharmacy.

Current regulatory settings require naloxone to be accessed through a health professional such as a pharmacist or doctor. In response to the 2018 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform the Victorian Government has committed to ease restrictions on naloxone in recognition and response to the barriers that people face in accessing this vital product. Proposed changes include:

- allowing health workers in authorised needle and syringe programs to directly supply naloxone to people who are at risk of, or who may witness, an opioid overdose
- enhancing the role of peers in naloxone programs.

Legislation to amend the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* is currently under development. The proposed legislation will increase access to naloxone for the purpose of treating opioid overdose. These reforms will better equip the community to respond to rising harms, including death from opioid use, and significantly enhance the government's broader drug harm reduction agenda.

The role of peers in the naloxone program will be enhanced under the new regulatory framework in that, once naloxone is supplied to a person it can be subsequently given to any other person. This will give peers a critical role in ensuring naloxone reaches those most vulnerable and in need of this life-saving medicine.

The implementation plan for these reforms will include education and training strategies to inform people who use opioids and their family members about overdose risk and the administration of naloxone.

The department will continue to work collaboratively with the Coroners Prevention Unit to address the concerning trend of increasing overdose related deaths in Victoria with targeted interventions of community education and harm minimisation.

Yours sincerely



Kym Peake
Secretary

16/08/2020