



Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

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Mikaela Meggetto
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006
Via Email: cpresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Megetto

Court reference: COR 2019 005437

Thank you for your letter of 24 July 2020 regarding Coroner Audrey Jamieson's recommendation and findings on the death of [REDACTED].

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

Recommendation:

With the aim of promoting public health and safety and preventing like deaths, I recommend that the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services review how education regarding synthetic cannabinoids is disseminated to health services and, if deemed appropriate and necessary, develop a training package or similar resource for clinicians to equip them to have conversations with patients about synthetic cannabinoid risks and harm reduction.

The department's response:

The department currently funds a range of alcohol and other drug service providers to inform consumers and clinicians about drug harms and harm reduction strategies, including those associated with synthetic cannabinoids. This includes fact sheets and information sessions.

Various indicators point to declining consumption and harms from synthetic cannabinoids in Victoria:

- self-reported use fell significantly between 2013 and 2016, from 1 per cent to 0.4 per cent, and further declined to 0.3 per cent in 2019 (*National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2019*)
- synthetic cannabinoid-related ambulance attendances peaked in 2017, and has remained consistently low since March 2018

- telephone calls to the Victorian Poisons Information Service (by clinicians and members of the public) regarding synthetic cannabinoids fell from 26 calls in 2017 to 9 calls in 2018 and has continued to fall.

The department considers the existing suite of resources, including those developed by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Harm Reduction Victoria and Youth Projects, sufficient to address current levels of harm.

The department is committed to supporting harm reduction approaches are, especially when considering vulnerable cohorts such as rough sleepers who are less likely to access conventional health services. The department currently funds a range of harm reduction agencies to deliver services to prevent and reduce drug overdoses. In 2019, one of these agencies, Youth Projects, distributed flyers and held information sessions about synthetic cannabinoids for rough sleepers, targeted service providers and peer networks.

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and changing trends in drug consumption, the department will promote drug information, including synthetic cannabis, to Primary Health Networks, to support circulation to General Practitioners. It will also request that alcohol and drug agencies disseminate such information to relevant stakeholders, consumers and peer workers. Additionally, a COVID-19 education campaign is under development in partnership with Pennington Institute focussed on harm reduction in people who use drugs, and information on synthetic cannabinoids will be included as part of this campaign.

While the development of an additional synthetic cannabinoid training package for clinicians is considered unnecessary in the current context, the department is considering a range of initiatives to better monitor and respond to alcohol and other drug consumption, harm and risk in a more systematic and timely manner.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Matthew Hercus, Executive Director, Mental Health and Drugs Branch at the Department of Health and Human Services on (03) 9096 7570 or email matthew.hercus@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Kym Peake
Secretary

21/09/2020