

Thursday 27 August 2026

Improved access to evidence-based drug harm reduction services needed in Greater Geelong, says Coroner

Victorian Coroner Simon McGregor has recommended there be better access to evidence-based drug harm reduction services in Greater Geelong, including that amendments to the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (Vic) are considered to allow for a medically supervised injecting centre (MSIC) in the region.

The recommendations follow an investigation into the death of a 33-year-old Geelong woman. On 5 December 2025, BP was found unresponsive in her bedroom by a family member at approximately 7:25pm. Ambulance paramedics attended the scene and pronounced her deceased. Several drugs were found near BP and a post-mortem examination showed combined drug toxicity – including heroin – caused her death.

To understand BP's death in context, Coroner McGregor reviewed data provided by the Coroners Prevention Unit on heroin-involved overdose deaths in Victoria. His Honour found that between 2015 and 2024, the annual number of heroin-involved deaths increased from 172 to 248. Preliminary figures indicate the number has grown to 261 in 2025. Between 2016 and 2025, there were 100 heroin-involved deaths in Greater Geelong, the sixth highest number for LGAs across the state, eclipsing other regional LGAs.

Coroner McGregor examined the drug harm reduction services and strategies currently in place in Greater Geelong, noting that while Barwon Health Mental Health, Drugs and Alcohol Services runs several programs including needle and syringe exchange, take-home naloxone and education on safer drug use for users, "one major evidence-based drug harm reduction service that Greater Geelong does not presently have is a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre."

In reviewing the legislative framework for MSICs in Victoria, Coroner McGregor found that there are currently barriers to opening a second safe injecting location in the state. "An MSIC cannot legally operate in Victoria unless it is licenced, and at present under the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (Vic) only a single licence can be in force at any one time," said His Honour. "An MSIC in Greater Geelong could only open under present legislation if the MSIC in Yarra was closed down. In my view this would not be an acceptable harm reduction trade-off."

His Honour further stated, "I have been unable to identify any public health grounds to justify limiting Victoria to one medically supervised injecting centre at a time."

His Honour observed, in the finding published today, that there are signs of an "emerging inequality between Metropolitan Melbourne and Regional Victoria in access to evidence-based drug harm reduction health services." While it is not possible to establish whether BP would have attended an MSIC, it could have provided opportunities for care and support had this service been available to her.

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To prevent similar deaths and improve access to evidence-based drug harm-reduction initiatives in Greater Geelong, and for all Victorians, Coroner McGregor recommends that:

- The Minister for Health and the Victorian Attorney-General consider amendments to the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (Vic) to remove the restriction that there must not be more than one medically supervised injecting centre licence and/or permitted site operative at the same time.
- The Department of Health urgently consult with drug and alcohol services and people with lived experience of injecting drug use in the Greater Geelong local government area, to identify and address any existing gaps in services, resourcing or otherwise that may be contributing to elevated drug-related mortality including heroin-involved overdoses in Greater Geelong.
- If amendments are made to the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (Vic) so as to remove the restriction that there must not be more than one medically supervised injecting centre licence and/or permitted site operative at the same time, the Victorian Government considers issuing a license for an MSIC location in Greater Geelong.

The finding can be accessed [here](#).

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