

Joint statement supporting a medically supervised injecting centre trial in Victoria

As leading community health organisations, peak bodies and advocates, we call on the Victorian Government to pass the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017*.

The trial of a medically supervised injecting centre (MSIC) in Richmond has widespread support from leading health experts and organisations,[1] the Yarra City Council,[2] and community leaders and businesses. Importantly, people who inject drugs also support a trial of an MSIC in Richmond, and coroners have now made formal recommendations in support of it as well.[3]

MSICs are facilities where people can inject drugs under medical supervision. This reduces the harms associated with injecting drug use, namely fatal overdose and the transmission of bloodborne viruses, such as HIV and hepatitis B and C. Other harms such as accidents, injection related injuries and infections, and stigmatisation of people who inject drugs are also reduced. MSICs also allow for a rapid response in the event of an overdose, the distribution of information about safer drug use practices, referrals to social support services, and treatment and other medical services.

The first MSIC opened in Switzerland in 1986, and Australia currently has one site, which has been operating in Kings Cross, Sydney, since 2001. There are now approximately 100 supervised injecting centres worldwide, a number likely to increase as governments recognise the importance of addressing substance use and harm from a health perspective rather than a law enforcement perspective. Canada has recently approved a number of these sites across their provinces, including three in Toronto alone, in response to the increases in drug-related overdoses. Remarkably, there has not been a single drug overdose fatality in any of the MSICs operating worldwide despite many having been in operation for decades.[4] Meanwhile in Victoria there were over 900 fatal overdoses in the last two years alone.[5]

Street-based injecting can often occur soon after purchasing substances, close to the point of sale, and in a hurry. MSICs move injecting drug use off the street and reduce associated harms. They also reduce the number of publicly discarded needles, which pose a potential health risk.[6] This is important given that North Richmond needle and syringe program distributes 70,000 syringes each month, some of which residents report finding discarded in public spaces.[7] In addition, MSICs reduce the demand on emergency services, which leads to significant cost savings and economic benefits.

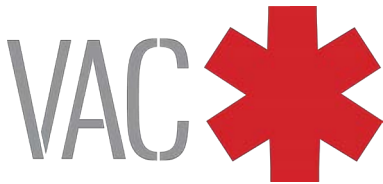
The remarkable success of Sydney's MSIC,[8] and others worldwide, provides a viable model for Victoria to emulate; one that works in the best interest of those who use the facility, the surrounding communities, and the community at large.

The evidence is overwhelming, MSICs work. We urge the Andrews Government to follow the advice of health experts, residents, and community leaders, and allow an 18-month trial of an MSIC in Richmond.

SIGNED BY:

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Ambulance Employees Australia Victoria
Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs
Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine
Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation
Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League
Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations
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Rationalist Society of Australia
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Royal Australasian College of Physicians
Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
Scarlet Alliance
Star Health
Students for Sensible Drug Policy Australia
Unharm
Uniting ReGen
Victorian Aboriginal community Controlled Health Organisation
Victorian AIDS Council
Victorian Alcohol & Drug Association
Vixen Collective
Windana
Yarra Drug & Health Forum
Youth Support + Advocacy Service



- [1] Royal Australasian College of Physicians. (2017). RACP submission: Victorian Parliament Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017. Submission no. 11. <<https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/pa-vic-parliament-msic-pilot-cpac.pdf>> (last accessed 21/08/17);
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. (2017). RACGP submission: Victorian Parliament Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017. Submission no. 43. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Injecting_Centres/Submissions/S43-RACGP.pdf> (last accessed 21/08/17).
- [2] Stone, A. (10/04/17). City of Yarra submission: Victorian Parliament Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017. Submission no. 9. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Injecting_Centres/Submissions/S9-City_of_Yarra.pdf> (last accessed 21/08/17).
- [3] Howard, G., Patten, F., Tilley, B. et al. (05/06/17). Transcript: Law Reform, Road, and Community Safety Committee. Inquiry into drug law reform. Victorian Government. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lrrcsc/Drugs_/Transcripts/2017.06.05_-_Transcript_-_RVSDSI.pdf> (last accessed 21/08/17).
- [4] Hedrich, D., Kerr, T. And Dubois-Arber, F. (2010). Chapter 11: Drug consumption facilities in Europe and beyond. In: EMCDDA Monographs: Harm reduction: evidence, impacts and challenges. (eds. T. Rhodes and D. Hedrich). European Monitoring. Centre for Drugs and Addiction, European Union, p.315.
- [5] Dwyer, J. and Millar, C. (2017). Victorian overdose deaths, heroin and place-based interventions. Coroners Prevention Unit, presented to the Yarra Drug and Health Forum on 1 May, 2017, PowerPoint slide 5.
- [6] Salmon, A., Kaldor, J. and Maher, L. (2007). Sydney medically supervised injecting centre evaluation report no. 4: Evaluation of service operation and overdose-related events. National Centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, Sydney, p.8. <<https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf>> (last accessed 21/08/17).
- [7] Personal communication. (August 2017). Judith Ryan of Residents for Victoria Street Drug Solutions.
- [8] Salmon, A., Kaldor, J. and Maher, L. (2007). Sydney medically supervised injecting centre evaluation report no. 4: Evaluation of service operation and overdose-related events. National Centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, Sydney, pp.1-47. <<https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf>> (last accessed 21/08/17).