

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government investment will thaw the impact of ice

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) today welcomes the Victorian Government Ice Action Taskforce endeavours and stage two funding announcements detailed in Saturday's press release and associated reporting.

With the spiralling alcohol and other drug (AOD) death toll surpassing 400 deaths in 2015, as reported earlier this month, the need for innovative and responsive activity from government to reduce AOD related harms is more necessary than ever.



Two of the major announcements include the expansion of the Victorian Drug Court and the establishment of an additional residential rehabilitation unit in rural and regional Victoria. These priorities are key asks in VAADA's 2016/17 state budget submission.

Both these much needed endeavours contribute to plugging serious gaps within the broader treatment sector. The Drug Court will provide broader access to a necessary and effective sentencing option which will reduce the pressure on Victoria's overburdened prison system.

VAADA also commends the other initiatives outlined by the Government, being a \$10M allocation to improve treatment facilities, the \$4M allocation for the four year extension of the Aboriginal Ice pilot program and \$5.5M for additional training and support to frontline workers.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA, says, 'The Victorian AOD residential rehabilitation system has been labouring under austere conditions for many years with blowouts on the waiting lists associated with access issues. The allocation of \$6M, to develop a new 18 – 20 bed unit in rural and regional Victoria is most welcome and necessary to assist in creating access to this important means of treatment.'

VAADA's 2016/17 state budget submission called for two 30 bed facilities in rural and regional Victoria and for additional Drug Courts in Victoria.

Mr Biondo continues, 'the \$32M allocation to create Drug Court capacity at the Melbourne Magistrates Court is most welcome, with the prison system under dire strain, with over 6000 prisoners. These difficulties are further exacerbated by a recidivism rate of 45%. Increased state-wide access to the Drug Court from 70 to 240 orders per year is part of the solution in addressing the crisis in our prisons. Hopefully this sentencing option will provide access for all high risk metropolitan regions. Given the strong evidence supporting the efficacy of the Drug court in reducing both crime and AOD harms, VAADA would support further expansion into regional areas.'

VAADA looks forward to working with government in the realisation of these endeavours.

VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo on 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.