

MEDIA RELEASE

FRIDAY 9 JUNE 2017

Responding to alcohol and other drug related harms in emerging 'hotspots'

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) notes with concern the increasing illicit substance related offending highlighted in recent data released from the Crime Statistics Agency (CSA).

This data identifies specific regions which have experienced an increase in illicit substance related offending, including a number of regional hubs, and also identifies an increase in the number of illicit substance related offending over recent years. It is important to note, however that there are a number of data sources which identify alcohol and other drug (AOD) related harms revealing varying trends.

These sources include the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, with the most recent iteration (2016) identifying a reduction in illicit substance use, including ice, across the nation. Other data sources such as fatal overdose and AOD related ambulance attendances have seen an increase in illicit substance contributions to community harm.

Ms Sharon (Molly) O'Reilly, acting EO of VAADA, states, 'AOD treatment agencies are telling us that there is an increased amount of justice mandated treatment demand which is increasing the burden on an already stretched service system which is consistent with this data'.

'However, the CSA data equally reflects AOD related use and harms as well as targeted policing practices and therefore is only one measure of AOD related harms. Assessing and determining AOD related harms and consumption patterns is a complex exercise necessitating consultation of the wide range of data sources available. The great majority of people who use alcohol and other drugs do not engage with the justice system', Ms O'Reilly continues.

In the 2017/18 state budget, the Victorian Government allocated \$78M to various measures to address AOD related harm and increase much needed capacity to the sector.

Ms O'Reilly continues, 'while demand continues to outstrip AOD service capacity, the most recent budget announcements will, going forward, assist in reducing waiting times for treatment, however, more can be done. As we know AOD treatment reduces the likelihood of AOD related offending. Increasing the capacity of the AOD treatment sector, and configuring the system to improve the way that people access our services would further reduce AOD related offending and improve community safety and wellbeing.'

VAADA encourages the government to adopt a 'bed for bed' approach, whereby an additional residential rehabilitation bed is funded for each new prison bed.

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 Sharon (Molly) O'Reilly on 0416027747 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.