

## MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 31 AUGUST 2018

# Overdose Awareness Day – a time to pause and think

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) recognises the gravity and importance of Overdose Awareness Day in light of Victoria's overdose toll surpassing 500 in 2017.

Overdose Awareness day provides us with the space to gain some perspective on these many unnecessary and preventable deaths which continue to mount, year on year.

We note that this year has seen the beginnings of effective action to stem the overwhelming tide of mortality through overdose through the introduction of various initiatives including Melbourne's first medically supervised injecting room. However, there is still much more to do.

Mr Sam Biondo, Executive Officer of VAADA, says, 'since 2009, there have been 3682 fatal overdoses in Victoria. These people are diverse spanning from young children to older adults, parents, daughters and sons, grandparents, friends and colleagues. They consist of people who were not able to receive support when they needed it, whether bereft of support following discharge from prison or having been inappropriately provided an abundance of medication to contend with a pain issue.'

'These people have died on the streets, in houses, businesses and in prison cells. Many have died alone, hidden away in laneways; others have died in the company of friends who were not aware of the dire risk until it was too late. The circumstances of many of these deaths often reveal what can be done to stop future similar deaths, making the challenge to government to heed the evidence and respond with pragmatic evidence informed policy.'

Mr Biondo continues, '3682 is not a small number; it is larger than the population of a number of Local government areas (LGA) including the entire population of the LGA of Otway in southern Victoria. As the years continue, the toll increases, with more families shattered by these preventable tragedies.'

Now is the time for action.

*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.**