

MEDIA RELEASE
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523 more deaths in Victoria

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) is gravely concerned regarding the rapid annual increase in fatal overdose since 2010 in light of the 2017 fatal overdose data released by the Victorian Coroners Court today. In the four years from 2013 to 2017, Victoria has seen a 40% percent increase in fatal overdoses and many of these deaths are preventable.

Commendably, the Victorian Government has begun to implement some of the policies necessary to stem this unacceptable overdose rate but there remain opportunities for bold governments to commit to further action.

The Victorian Coroner's Court data highlights a number of disturbing trends:

- Heroin contributions to fatal over dose have doubled in the past five years, from 107 to 220;
- Benzodiazepines now contribute to 6:10 fatal overdoses (303 of the 523 in 2017), up from 5:10 in previous years;
- 30% of all fatal overdoses in 2017 solely involved pharmaceuticals which highlights the need to get Safescript right;
- Alcohol contributions have increased annually, most recently up from 124 to 151 from 2016 to 2017.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA says, 'the rate of increase in fatal overdoses is far surpassing the broader population growth in Victoria and continues to be a pressing concern for the community. We are seeing greater complexity with these deaths, with a larger portion having taken multiple drugs, creating a toxic cocktail from which the risk of death is high. There are a number of initiatives yet to be fully implemented which government have undertaken which show promise, but this disturbing data starkly reveals that much still needs to be done'.

The Victorian government initiatives relating to naloxone, supervised injecting, additional alcohol and other drug treatment capacity and real time prescription monitoring all have the potential to have a marked positive impact in reducing this overwhelming toll.

Mr Biondo continues, 'while the policy settings are improving greatly, there is uncertainty regarding some of the smaller details. For instance, real time prescription monitoring, which if implemented now could have impacted upon up to 414 pharmaceutical related deaths in 2017, but there is a need to ensure that the support services for those identified by this new system are adequately resourced to cater for an increase in demand, including mental health, alcohol and other drug and pain management.'

Mr Biondo concludes, 'my concern with drug policy is the delay to which evidence translates into practice; with 1340 fatal overdoses involving heroin in Victoria from 2009 to 2017 preceding Victoria's first supervised injecting centre. Let's hope that the implementation of similar policy in the future does not necessitate a similar toll.'

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