

MEDIA RELEASE

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Ice inquiry: a framework for action

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) welcomes the release of the Victorian Parliament inquiry report into the supply and use of methamphetamines in Victoria. The report provides extensive detail on this issue and details a wide range of recommendations.

VAADA generally supports the report and its recommendations.

The premise in developing a ministerial council and subsequent strategy on methamphetamine may in the longer term be better served through the development of an alcohol and other drugs commission, which would provide guidance, synthesize the evidence and relevant data pertaining not just to methamphetamine but to all drugs.

Sam Biondo, executive officer of VAADA, says, 'we have been calling for an established body such as a commission to oversee the review of evidence and data, and provide guidance in the development of policy for alcohol and other drug policy for a long time. Given that methamphetamine use is almost always accompanied by other drugs, this type of body would be well placed to deal with the complexity of social, legal and health issues impacting the Victorian community.'

VAADA has called for the development of an innovation fund to assist alcohol and other drug treatment agencies in piloting new and innovative treatment methods. This report correctly emphasises the need to build an evidence base around alcohol and other drug treatment and the development of an innovation fund would assist in this endeavour.

Mr Biondo says, 'we support the emphasis on evidence informed interventions for addressing issues related to methamphetamine; we would urge that all associated endeavours, including, but not limited to, policing, education and prevention activities, also establish an evidence base.'

In line with innovative practice, funding models must be flexible to account for the intricacies evident in treating specific drug types. The report's recommendation to '*provide a funding model that factors in the unique needs of users, including longer withdrawal and community treatment episodes, as well as supported aftercare programs*' is necessary to best respond drug trends.

Rural and regional alcohol and other drug treatment services have been chronically underfunded for many years, resulting in a limited array of services provided in the bush. The report's recommendation to ensure withdrawal beds, residential rehab beds and outpatient services are well resourced is key to reducing the inequitable health outcomes currently experienced in rural and regional areas.

The provision of additional training to build the capacity of workforces interfacing with methamphetamine users is most welcome and we look forward to working with government on this endeavour. Further to this, the emphasis on families is most welcome, and we would encourage further allocations to increase the capacity of the alcohol and other drug sector to better assist families experiencing these challenges.

VAADA has made strident efforts in expanding the drug court to other regions in Victoria and welcome the recommendation to develop drug courts in Melbourne, Geelong, Sunshine and Gippsland. This broadly fits with the concept of justice reinvestment, which is endorsed in the report; justice reinvestment aims to divert funding from less effective measures such as prisons to more effective community based measures. It is paramount that justice reinvestment is encapsulated in all government policy.



Mr Biondo says, 'Drug Courts are evidence informed programs which can draw together a wide range of professionals to assist an individual in addressing their alcohol and other drug issues. It is far more effective than prison, and much cheaper. Rolling out Drug Courts during this time of heightened methamphetamine harms and in light of extraordinary cost burden to Victoria associated with the prison build is eminently responsible and sensible'.

Importantly, the report provides robust support for harm reduction measures including but not limited to NSP. This is a very welcome recommendation, as it has come at a time when harm reduction services are experiencing a reduction in funding across Australia, with recent national research noting a reduction in harm reduction related spending. This must be reversed.

There are a range of other laudable recommendations, including those calling for further support to at risk communities, which should be considered.

Mr Biondo concludes, 'we hope that this report makes a strong and enduring impact on alcohol and other drug related policy, and is not shelved as has been the case with previous reports. We look forward to working with government and other stakeholders in the realisation of these recommendations.

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.