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MEDIA RELEASE: COMMON SENSE APPROACH WELCOMED TO PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) welcomes the Victorian government's announcement to decriminalise public drunkenness.

The announcement, which aligns with a recommendation from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, seeks to remove an archaic law which drives those experiencing disadvantage further into harms way.

The Victorian government has committed to establishing a committee who will advise on the development of a health-based response to public drunkenness.

Mr Sam Biondo, Executive Officer of VAADA, says, 'highly disadvantaged individuals sometimes bereft of a private dwelling experiencing acute disadvantage often would fall foul of public drunkenness laws, driving them unnecessarily deeper into the justice system, and criminalising the symptoms of entrenched disadvantage.'

'These laws further anchored vulnerable Victorians into the justice system, adding to the cycle of debt, dependency and death.'

The Victorian Government has indicated that these reforms are related to a recent coronial inquest, where a fatality could have been prevented through the application of a health-based response to public drunkenness.

Mr Biondo Continues, 'the Coroners Court undertakes vital work in proposing recommendations to reduce preventable fatalities; such work highlights the increasing harms associated with alcohol, with alcohol related fatal overdoses doubling in six years from 80 (2012) to 159 (2018).'

Alcohol related harm is pervasive. Implementing a health response to public drunkenness brings Victoria in line with contemporary practice.

'While we await further information from the government as the committee conducts business, we caution against shifting the burden onto our tired emergency system without ensuring adequate capacity within alcohol and other drug treatment facilities. For too long, both the emergency and correctional systems have been a revolving door for individuals experiencing alcohol and other drug dependency who cannot access the treatment system.'

For more information contact Executive Officer Sam Biondo 03 94125600