

## MEDIA RELEASE

1 April 2020

[starts]

### SafeScript a welcome reform but the risk of patient displacement during pandemic remains

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) has been a long term advocate for the introduction of real time prescription monitoring as a means to reduce the excessive pharmaceutical toll within Victoria.

Victoria's real time prescription monitoring system, SafeScript, through identifying patients at risk of pharmaceutical harm by past prescriptions, provides an opportunity to support patients who are at risk of pharmaceutical related harm.

It will be mandatory for all doctors and pharmacists to consult SafeScript when prescribing/dispensing certain medications from today.

Mr Sam Biondo, Executive Officer of VAADA, says, 'while we have advocated for the introduction of this system for the better part of a decade, SafeScript does not have the necessary supports appended to the system for vulnerable patients who may require pain management, alcohol or other drug treatment, including opioid replacement therapy, or other related health concerns.'

'These concerns are more pressing with the pending pandemic of COVID-19, which may result in service contraction and displacement of workforces to deal with this serious health issue. This may leave those identified by SafeScript with limited support at a time when their medication regime may be de-escalated.'

VAADA's budget submission notes that potentially tens of thousands of Victorians may be identified in the next six months, resulting in additional strain to primary health and other service systems.

'The government needs to proceed with caution during this time; transitioning people off medications prescribed over a long term will cause risk to the patients and demand in other service areas at a time when the focus will be on COVID-19.'

'There are some benefits which should be noted; in allowing for instantaneous access to a patient's prescription history, it may be easier to prove that they had previously been supported through opioid replacement therapy and therefore allow them to be fast tracked back into the system; a strong benefit, especially at this time.'

'VAADA remains highly concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on those experiencing substance dependence, a large portion who will also experience other morbidities. This cohort are highly vulnerable to COVID-19 and displacing people from this cohort into uncertainty during this time exacerbates existing risk.'

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*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 Scott Drummond on 0400 722 859 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.**