

MEDIA RELEASE

8/3/2022

[starts]

Reform proposal a far better way to reduce drug harms

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) supports reforms that will divert people who are caught possessing and using currently illicit drugs away from the justice system.

To that end, VAADA supports the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence) Bill 2022*, which will shift the dial incrementally from prohibition to depenalisation.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA, says, 'Australia has failed to implement progressive pragmatic policies that make a difference and has for decades persisted with failed law and order policies, at great social cost'.

'In Victoria, across almost every relevant data source, alcohol and other drug related harms have been increasing year on year, creating a greater burden on the health system, families, the justice system and the community.'

In the past decade, the overdose rate in Victoria has escalated from less than one death per day to 1.5 deaths per day amounting to a 50% increase in fatal overdose in the past decade.

'The cumbersome cost of maintaining the current flawed policy framework is astronomical. With COVID-19 and the associated fiscal debt burden, governments do not have the luxury of continuing to pour good money after bad. Pursuing failed blunt justice policy, which simply burdens the Victorian tax payer with ever greater recurrent expense, while simultaneously returning 54.8% of released prisoners back into the justice system within two years, is a luxury Victoria can ill afford.'

Over 50% of the annual national cannabis cost to government (\$4.5B) is attributed to law and order issues (predominantly policing and imprisonment)¹. There are better things we can do to help these people and better things we can do with this money. This Bill would assist in availing these scarce resources into other more effective endeavour such as treatment, health and education.

'This Bill would set Victoria on a course which would see a reduction in imprisonment and justice related expense. It would place a greater emphasis on treatment, health and wellbeing and put us in step with other nations which have already progressed similar pragmatic reforms.'

[ends]

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, EO of VAADA, on 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.

¹ <https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/news-events/ndri-news/media-release-cannabis-use-costs-australia-4-5-bil>