

MEDIA RELEASE

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Pandemic Oversight Committee Minority Report recommends increased drug treatment capacity

The Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee (the Committee) today released two reports which made a number of recommendations.

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) supports recommendations 13 – 16 of the Minority Report which highlight the increasing alcohol and other drug (AOD) harms and soaring demand for AOD treatment which has occurred during the pandemic.

Recommendations 13 – 16

13. That the Department of Health undertake a special inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 related stressors on women presenting under the influence of alcohol and/or with indications of high alcohol use or addiction in ambulance presentations, presentations to the emergency department and hospital admissions.

14. That the Andrews Labor Government immediately expand drug and alcohol treatment services in Victoria.

15. That the Andrews Labor Government immediately reverse funding cuts to the AOD sector delivered in this year's budget, and reinstate funding for 100 EFT AOD workers under the COVID workforce initiative.

16. While pandemic orders are in force, that the Department of Health publish data on a weekly basis related to presentations to emergency department with self harm or suicidal behaviour, eating disorders, presence of drug and alcohol addiction, family violence and mental illness, defined by key demographics such as gender, age, CALD and ATSI, and include historical data for trending purposes.

Evidence provided to the Committee from VAADA highlighted consistent AOD sector feedback, supported by evidence and reflecting the experience of people seeking treatment, included:

- The number of people waiting each day for AOD treatment has increased by 71.4% over the pandemic, from 2385 to 4088 people;
- To meet current levels of demand, the AOD sector needs 242.8 FTE of AOD treatment clinicians; and
- The 2022/23 Victorian budget cut the AOD sector by \$39.8M, which includes the cessation of a COVID-19 workforce program which will see the AOD sector workforce reduced by 100 FTE.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA, says, 'we welcome the focus in the Minority Report on the needs of people seeking help for alcohol and other drug issues. The pandemic has driven an increasing number of people towards treatment, many who have not previously engaged and others experiencing relapse.'

'The transaction cost of an under resourced AOD treatment sector is greater levels of preventable ill health, fatal overdose and the further burdening of our stretched health systems.'

'We strongly recommend that the government adopt these recommendations to address the surging AOD harms which have occurred during the pandemic.'

To access the Committees reports, see: <https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/review-of-pandemic-orders/reports>

To access VAADA's election statement and companion summary, see:

Summary: https://www.vaada.org.au/?smd_process_download=1&download_id=30375

Full Statement: https://www.vaada.org.au/?smd_process_download=1&download_id=30372

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Media stories on alcohol and other drugs may be traumatic for some people. Support is available and we ask that media agencies consider publishing the details below:

If this story has raised issues about your own or others drug and alcohol use, please contact the national hotline for confidential counselling and referral on 1800 250 015

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.