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PRESS RELEASE

Victorian Government commences AOD reforms, but CBD injecting room cruelled by fear and stigma.

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The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) welcomes aspects of today's announcement of a Statewide Action Plan to reduce drug harms, including the development of an alcohol and other drug (AOD) strategy for Victoria along with new health services for the City of Melbourne.

However, we share the disappointment of many in the community that the Victorian Government will not be proceeding with a 2nd medically supervised injecting facility (MSIR) in the CBD.

The \$95.1M announcement over four years will provide a range of outreach AOD, mental health, harm reduction and other supports as well as establish necessary frameworks to advise on an enhanced and responsive AOD service system in Victoria.

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA, says, 'the announcement of Statewide Action Plan is bittersweet, given the innovations to save lives are offset by the decision to not proceed with a CBD MSIR. This is despite the best advice of experts, including Mr Ken Lay APM who have called for its establishment. VAADA will continue to advocate on the need for a medically supervised injecting facility in the CBD and other high risk areas of Victoria. Fear and stigma continue to cruel good public policy.'

'We strongly support the development of a statewide alcohol and other drug strategy, noting that planning in how we sustainably address AOD harms in the community has been largely piecemeal for decades. We hope this work will provides the foundation for the progression of evidence informed policies to address AOD harms over the long-term.'

The government's focus on opioid pharmacotherapy is highly welcomed with the fragility of Victoria's opioid replacement treatment (ORT) system in plain sight to address. The grants program to address ORT service gaps across the state is an excellent start to creating stable treatment services for people with opioid addictions, including in regional and rural communities.'

'We also commend the government on trialing hydromorphone, with these types of initiatives (including the increased access to naloxone) playing a protective role in the event of a rise in fentanyl and other potent synthetic opioids. However, we would encourage the government to expand the availability of hydromorphone beyond the CBD, including the MSIR in North Richmond. With 90% of heroin related fatal overdoses occurring outside of the CBD, there is a need for this solution to be offered statewide.'

Today, there will be many Victorians, including families who have lost loved ones to overdose, who will be saddened by the government's announcement that they will not proceed with a CBD medically supervised injecting facility. We stand with these families and will continue to advocate for policies that save lives and keep people safe.'

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact David Taylor via the details below.

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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.



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