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PRESS RELEASE

[starts]

State Budget does not address soaring drug treatment waitlists

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) acknowledges that despite considerable fiscal challenges in returning the State's finances to pre-pandemic health, the 2024/25 Victorian State Budget appears to have largely maintained alcohol and other drug (AOD) funding at existing levels.

The 1% increase to AOD funding in 2024/25 up to \$376.3M, includes \$9.7m in additional measures under the Victorian Government's Statewide Action Plan. This however is offset by the regrettable decision to not proceed with a 2nd overdose prevention centre in the CBD.

The State Budget will do little to address surging demand for AOD treatment in Victoria, with the number of people waiting for treatment on any given day increasing by 40% since the start of the pandemic. Nor will it address the increasing cost of providing services, which threaten the sustainability of the AOD sector, including residential rehabilitation, forensic treatment and rural and regional services.

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA, notes, 'While the AOD Statewide Action Plan provides several opportunities to innovate the way we address the harms of alcohol and other drug use across Victoria, we remain very concerned about the ability of the service system to meet the increasing demand for support in the short term. Our services are weighed by the cost of meeting the complex needs of people experiencing substance dependence and this budget does little to address that.'

'Acknowledging the reality that Victorian families are missing out on support when they need it, we are keen to work with the Victorian Government to begin progressing the development of an AOD Strategy. This gives us hope, that the systemic issues that have plagued alcohol and other drug service design in Victoria, will be addressed through a coherent and evidence-based approach that moves Victoria from a piecemeal response towards being a world leader in supporting people experiencing substance dependence.'

'The way forward must include harm reduction measures like drug checking services, overdose prevention centres and drug policy reforms. Without these measures, Victoria will remain acutely exposed to the dangers of potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl and nitazenes which are wreaking an enormous human toll overseas'

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact David Taylor on 0413 914 206.

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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. Daily these services deal with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.