

PRESS RELEASE

[starts]

Victoria needs a potent synthetic opioids plan

Potent synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl and nitazenes have contributed to the thousands of overdoses in other countries. In 2022, they contributed to approximately 80,000 fatal overdoses in the USA.

In Australia, there have been recent health alerts indicating that illicit drugs such as cocaine have been adulterated with a range of substances, with an increasing number of alerts involving nitazenes.

While Australia has so far avoided a surge in the prevalence of these substances, a police seizure of over 11kg of fentanyl in late 2021 highlights the rapidity with which illicit drug markets could be flooded with these substances. **Without access to a safer, regulated drug supply and widespread availability of harm reduction services; this would surely result in a rapid surge in overdoses and the grief that follows; it would also rapidly overwhelm our health system.**

In acknowledgement of this risk, Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic) and the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) have developed a paper calling for the sector and the Victorian Government to work together on developing and delivering a Potent Synthetic Opioids Plan.

Sione Crawford, CEO of HRVic, says, 'Victoria is putting in place some good foundations with drug checking promised but we also know we have no time to lose. While so far potent opioid detections have seemed like isolated incidents; we are at the point where these incidents appear to be a pattern and now require a more coordinated response. We need to ensure that all stakeholders are viewing this threat through a public health lens and we need to rapidly convene experts and communities of people who use drugs to support the response. We do not want the community to be grieving any more friends and family in the coming months and years.'

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA says, 'emergency preparedness in the interests of public health is essential. When crises or natural disasters occur, having a plan that can support those most at risk and those most likely to respond first is crucial. This is why we have worked with Harm Reduction Victoria to develop this paper. By continuing to take a health led approach, and prioritising harm reduction measures, we offer a framework for a Potent Synthetic Opioids Plan to keep Victorians safe. It is through being prepared that we can best avoid the human toll from fentanyl and nitazenes currently being experienced in North America.'

Our paper can be accessed from : <https://www.vaada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Victoria-Needs-a-Potent-Synthetic-Opioid-Plan.pdf>

Recommendation: Establish a Synthetic Opioids Taskforce under the direction of the Chief AOD Officer to develop and operationalise a Potent Synthetic Opioids Plan, drawing on this framework to ensure that any harms which may occur due to a surge in potent synthetic opioids in Victoria are mitigated.

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

[ends]

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.