

PRESS RELEASE

3 October 2024

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Pragmatic reforms required to curb Victoria's soaring overdose toll

The fatal overdose data released today by the Coroners Court of Victoria is of great concern to the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA), highlighting the ongoing despair and pain in our community from continuing high rates of fatal overdose.

The Court revealed that 547 Victorians suffered a fatal overdose in 2023, 3 less than 2022, but still the second highest number of fatalities on record for Victoria.

While there is some fluctuation in the substances contributing to these numbers, the steady increase in illicit substances contributing to fatal overdose is of major concern, particularly when coupled with the rise in deaths from novel psychoactive substances, including potent synthetic opioids like nitazenes.

The data reveals that over the past decade, 5,052 Victorians have lost their lives to fatal overdose. This staggering figure is in spite of the ongoing work to make inroads into reducing substance related harm.

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA, says, 'each person who fatally overdosed in 2023 had family, friends and loved ones who now keenly feel their loss. Bereaved families are often left to pick up the pieces and work through the associated trauma that comes with their grief. This is complicated by the stigma and discrimination experienced with overdose.'

'While the Victorian Government is to be commended on progressing harm reduction policies like drug checking and expanding access to naloxone, deep frustration remains with the decision to abandon a CBD medically supervised injecting room.'

The facility in North Richmond has managed over 9,000 overdoses since it first opened and supported over 1,000 people onto opioid pharmacotherapy. Despite some fluctuations in the annual overdose data, a clear need remains for additional medically supervised injecting centres, not only in the CBD, but in other high-risk areas.

'The increasing frequency of fentanyl and nitazenes adulterating traditional illicit drugs only increases the risk that fatal overdose numbers will grow. This is why we have called on the Victorian Government to lead the nation in developing a [Potent Synthetic Opioids Plan](#) to ensure that we are best prepared for any escalation in this crisis.'

'With the government currently embarking on the development of an Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy for Victoria it is vital that these overdose numbers weigh heavily on the minds of those progressing this work. We will continue to work with our members and government to champion the pragmatic reforms necessary to reduce overdose deaths, because every life matters.'

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.