

PRESS RELEASE

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Drug adulteration from potent synthetic opioids remains a nationwide risk

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) notes the importance of the inquest into the tragic overdose of four individuals in Broadmeadows on 25 June 2024.

These fatalities highlight the heightened risks associated with the adulteration of illicit substances like cocaine, with potent synthetic opioids, such as nitazenes.

The risk of harm, including fatal overdose, is severe for people intending to consume a stimulant but who unwittingly ingest a powerful opioid like fentanyl or nitazenes. This is especially the case when people consume these substances and do not anticipate opioids to be present.

This inquest represents a difficult time for those families and friends grieving the loss of loved ones and reminds us of the hundreds of preventable overdoses that occur each year in Victoria. The Coroners Court last year published that a staggering 601 fatal overdoses occurred in Victoria during the financial year 2023/24.

In response to the growing risk of drug-related harm due to adulterated supply, VAADA and Harm Reduction Victoria developed a paper calling for a [Potent Synthetic Opioid Plan](#) to be developed for Victoria, to counter the worst of the synthetic opioid crisis ravaging communities around the world.

The paper recommends a range of actions for emergency preparedness, with some of these in the process of being implemented by the Victorian Government.

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA, says, 'I express my condolences to those loved ones bereaved by the four fatal overdoses in Broadmeadows last year. The raw grief expressed by impacted families was incredibly moving.'

'The hearing today highlights how the unanticipated adulteration of illicit drugs can be fatal, especially with the increasing frequency of potent synthetic opioids in the illicit drug supply. From the evidence provided, fatal overdose can be reduced by investing in the right interventions to identify risk and respond quickly. Continuing to expand early warning systems, informed by data collected from the drug testing service and other sources, is essential to reduce substance-related harm in Victoria and elsewhere across Australia.'

'It is clear from the evidence provided to the Coroners Court of Victoria that the rapid growth in new novel substances, together with increasing potency and the broad array of substances subject to adulteration, including vapes, sees the risk of another mass overdose event like the one in Broadmeadows continue to remain high.

For more information or to arrange an interview, 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, 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 drugs.