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## **PRESS RELEASE**

[starts]

### **Gaps in alcohol and other drug services contributing to extraordinary overdose toll**

The fatal overdose data released today by the Coroners Court of Victoria is of major concern to the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA).

The Court revealed that 584 Victorians suffered a fatal overdose in 2024, 37 more than in 2023 and the highest number of fatal overdoses by calendar year on record for Victoria.

The distress to the community caused by fatal overdose is overwhelming; there is an ever-increasing number of Victorians suffering due to the loss of loved ones through preventable overdose, with the rate of fatal overdose increasing far more rapidly than population growth over the last decade.

Of particular concern is the surging increase in fatal overdoses involving illicit substances. This clearly demonstrates the shortcomings from the overemphasis on policing activities, which consumes two-thirds of all alcohol and other drug (AOD) funding. The war on drugs continues to fail badly.

Chris Christoforou, CEO of VAADA, says, '2024 is a watershed moment. 583 overdoses is a sad state of affairs. I hold grave fears that this level of fatality is fast becoming normal.'

'While we commend the Victorian Government on continuing to progress its Statewide Action Plan, clearly it is not enough. Alcohol and other drug treatment services are unable to cope with requests for help, resulting in excessive wait times. These wait times can sometimes span months, essentially making treatment unattainable. We are worried that people are giving up.'

'This data is again marked by an increase in heroin related fatal overdoses. The continuing debate on the value of medically supervised injecting, led by misinformed and stigmatising narratives, has sadly stymied further support. What we see in today's data is the real impact of these debates. We need to increase medically supervised injecting capacity across high-risk areas as a matter of urgency.'

'With the government finalising an Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy for Victoria, it is vital that the consequences of these overdose numbers are central to the 10-year plan. The importance and urgency of reducing this toll must be an absolute priority, because behind every fatal overdose there are families and friends left grieving.'

**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, 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.**



**[www.vaada.org.au](http://www.vaada.org.au)**