

19 September 2025

To: Melbourne City Council

## **Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association response to M2050 Vision and Council Plan**

The [Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association \(VAADA\)](http://www.vaada.org.au) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the M250 Council Vision and Plan. As the peak body for the Victorian alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector, we note that the City of Melbourne experiences high levels of AOD-related harm, and these documents provide a vehicle to address these harms.

Our submission calls for the suspension of the use of security officers to enforce local laws. It notes that this policy will likely have a detrimental effect on people already experiencing significant social disadvantage, such as people experiencing homelessness and substance dependence. Using security officers to enhance community safety fails to address the drivers of social disadvantage, only serving to increase stigma and discrimination against people most at risk. At the same time, it will not foster trust in accessing formal help-seeking pathways. Rather than expenditure on security officers who are not trained to deal with social and health complexities, the City of Melbourne should invest in responding to the health and wellbeing needs of priority communities, including through increased investment in social housing, alcohol and other drug services, homelessness outreach, and mental health support. Central to this is the need to invest in increased drug harm reduction support, including funding a primary Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) site in the Central Business District (CBD).

VAADA recommends:

1. That the City of Melbourne suspend the engagement/employment of security officers to enforce local laws against people experiencing homelessness

2. That the City of Melbourne redirect funding towards increased support for people experiencing homelessness, AOD dependence and mental health issues, to address the underlying drivers of disadvantage
3. That, in light of soaring overdose rates, at least one primary NSP be established to operate from the CBD in the City of Melbourne; to be augmented with a Naloxone dispensing machine.

## **M2050 Vision and Plan**

VAADA welcomes several items from Melbourne City Council's Draft Vision and Plan. In particular, we commend the following from the Vision:

- People first, diverse and creative
- Inclusive growth that delivers for everyone
- Bold leadership

From the Plan, we support:

- A people-centred city
- Always consider public health and wellbeing
- Safe and accessible by design
- Deepening connection to country

We also recognise the Melbourne City Council's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular to:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all
4. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies

## **The challenge and opportunity to reduce AOD related harm in Melbourne**

With 42 fatal overdoses in the City of Melbourne, 2024 not only marked the highest number of overdose deaths in the Melbourne LGA in the past decade, but also was the highest for any Victorian LGA last year<sup>1</sup>. Melbourne also had the highest number of heroin and methamphetamine overdoses in 2024<sup>2</sup>, along with

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Coroners Court 2025. Victorian overdose deaths, 2015-2024. Coroners Prevention Unit.  
<https://coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-08/Victorian%20Overdose%20Deaths%202015-2024.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

the highest number of AOD-related paramedic attendances in 2023/24<sup>3</sup> in comparison to other Victorian LGAs.

There are various cohorts at increased risk of AOD-related harm in the CBD, including First Nations people who, despite representing only 0.55% of people living in the CBD, represent 17% of the people sleeping rough<sup>4</sup>. Women represent one in four people sleeping rough in the CBD, with 45% of women seeking housing support having experienced domestic, family and sexual violence (DSFV)<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, one in four people sleeping rough in the CBD are children<sup>6</sup>, with over half having involvement with child protection and a prior experience of self-harm.

Nationally, during 2023/24, 24,100 housing support clients reported AOD challenges, with three in four of those clients also experiencing a co-occurring mental health issue<sup>7</sup>.

The City of Melbourne hosts a population experiencing acute AOD harms overlayed by significant social disadvantage. Reflecting on AOD support, the Victorian Government's *Statewide Action Plan*<sup>8</sup> announced in 2024 holds some promise in supporting at risk communities in the CBD; however, many of the initiatives are still being implemented.

The trial of security officers greatly undermines the efforts made to better engage at risk cohorts through health outreach teams and exacerbates the discriminatory public narratives about people who use drugs. This can lead to a reluctance to engage with health-led services and increases the likelihood of using drugs in isolation, greatly elevating the risk of harms, including overdose. Patrols by security officers also create the risk of exacerbating existing trauma within target population groups.

While the security officer trial may temporarily increase a perception of safety for some people, the reality from decades of experience where similar measures have been implemented is an increase in negative outcomes and the transference

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<sup>3</sup> Turning Point 2025, AODstats.org.au

<sup>4</sup> City of Melbourne 2025. Homes Melbourne.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Launch Housing 2025. The Difficult Choice: Unpacking the rapid rise of homelessness amongst women. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/launch-housing-safe-housing-for-women-and-children/2025/may/16/the-difficult-choice-unpacking-the-rapid-rise-of-homelessness-amongst-women>

<sup>6</sup> Council of Homelessness, 2025. [Homelessness facts, stats, and insights. https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2022-About-Homelessness-4.png](https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2022-About-Homelessness-4.png)

<sup>7</sup> AIHW 2025. People experiencing homelessness. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/priority-populations/people-experiencing-homelessness>

<sup>8</sup> See [health.vic.gov.au/aod-treatment-services/statewide-action-plan-to-reduce-drug-harms](https://health.vic.gov.au/aod-treatment-services/statewide-action-plan-to-reduce-drug-harms)

rather than elimination of safety concerns. The rights of people sleeping rough in the CBD should not be undermined, based on harmful and often false stereotypes.

Access to core services, such as primary NSP and other drug harm reduction services, such as opioid pharmacotherapy, peer support and AOD treatment, should be enhanced in response to escalating harms. Given the high rate of fatal overdose, it would be prudent for the City of Melbourne to work with the Victorian Government to reconsider the benefits of establishing a medically supervised injecting facility in the CBD.

The use of security officers should be suspended immediately, with funding redirected towards measures that will address these challenges, reducing health and social harms and better supporting Melbourne City Council's Draft Vision and Plan.

**Should you have any queries, please contact Dave Taylor, Manager Advocacy and Media on [dtaylor@vaada.org.au](mailto:dtaylor@vaada.org.au).**

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