

## VHA applauds safe injecting facility trial

The peak body for Victoria's public health services has applauded today's courageous State Government announcement of a supervised injecting facility trial, Victorian Healthcare Association CEO Tom Symondson said today.

"We are delighted the Government has responded to the overwhelming data which indicates supervised injecting facilities will save lives," Mr Symondson said today. "While it might be a controversial issue, we are in the business of advocating care for those who need it."

The VHA formally called for a trial of supervised injecting rooms in its submission in April into the [Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre\) Bill 2017](#).

VHA member North Richmond Community Health has been selected as the site for the trial of Victoria's first safe injecting room. Dozens of lives have been lost to heroin overdoses in Richmond in recent years.

"The problems associated with heroin use are significant for health services. The VHA and our members want to ensure there are appropriate strategies to minimise the harmful effects of heroin use which contributes to significant loss of life, injury, illness and use of substantial health resources.

"Many community health services commit significant resources and employ strategies including needle and syringe programs, outreach services, naloxone distribution and education to support this marginalised and difficult-to-reach group.

"The most compelling reason to trial a supervised injecting facility is that it will save lives of heroin users."

Thirty-four people have lost their lives to drug overdoses so far in 2017, according to reports. In 2015, heroin overdose accounted for 172 Victorian deaths and in the City of Yarra, there was a fatal overdose more than once every three weeks.

"The research shows in other places they are working well and don't have the negative impact that some feared," Mr Symondson said.

From 2001–2010, the Kings Cross facility managed 3000 overdoses with no reported deaths within the facility mirroring similar results around the world. Overdoses can be managed quickly before symptoms progress and users had more time to consume the drug, reducing the risk of overdose.

Education provided by Kings Cross site staff led to safer injection practices, reduced needle sharing and better understanding of overdose signs by users. There were also fewer reported notifications of Hepatitis C and HIV.

Local Kings Cross residents reported seeing less frequent public injecting and a slight reduction in presence of needles in public areas and there was no reported increase in crime in the local area.

The VHA is the not-for-profit peak body supporting Victoria's public hospitals, community health services and aged care providers to deliver quality care.

### For more information contact:

**Rosanne Michie** | Director of Media & Communications  
m. 0411 868535 or e. [rosanne.michie@vha.org.au](mailto:rosanne.michie@vha.org.au)

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