

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Friday, 5 June 2020

SAVING AND REBUILDING LIVES FROM DRUG ADDICTION

The Victorian Government has accepted all recommendations of the independent review of Victoria's first Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR), which has found the trial is saving lives and changing lives for people struggling with drug addiction.

After 18 months of work, the final report from the independent review panel chaired by Professor Margaret Hamilton found the MSIR in North Richmond saw over 119,000 visits and saved at least 21 lives.

The facility has safely managed 3,200 overdoses – taking pressure off emergency departments and reducing ambulance call outs – and has led to a decrease in reports of public injecting in the North Richmond area.

Staff have also provided more than 13,000 health and social support interventions for issues like mental health, housing and family violence – helping those suffering with addiction recover and rebuild their lives.

As a result of the findings, the panel's expert advice has recommended the MSIR trial be extended for three years.

The report also found North Richmond facility is the busiest supervised injecting room in Australia, with 4,350 clients registering since it opened.

To take pressure off the existing facility, and further reduce drug related harm in the community, the independent review panel has recommended a second MSIR site be established in the City of Melbourne, where there were 51 tragic heroin-related deaths between January 2015 and September 2019.

The Department of Health and Human Services has recommended a preferred site for the second service at cohealth Central Melbourne on Victoria Street, between Swanston and Elizabeth Street. As one of the largest community health services in Victoria, cohealth's diverse range of established health and social services mean it is well-placed to be a site for a second MSIR facility.

The Government will work with the community, Victoria Police, the City of Melbourne, local health and community services and other authorities to confirm that the preferred site is the most appropriate location by the end of the year. Legislation will also need to pass the Parliament to establish the second site.

More than \$9 million will be invested to improve the area around the North Richmond facility to undertake neighbourhood renewal including significant improvements to the nearby public housing estate, upgrades to landscaping and open green spaces, playgrounds and community rooms, and extra lighting. The funding will also mean \$3 million to support projects identified in partnership with the local community, for the local community.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"We've listened to the medical experts when responding to coronavirus and we'll continue listening to them when it comes to saving lives and reducing harm from drug addiction."

"When we talk about these numbers, we should never lose sight of what it is we're really counting: lives saved. And this review has shown the safe injecting room is doing what it is designed to do – saving lives and changing lives."

Quote attributable to Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley

"We thank the review panel for their detailed and considered work. We know we need to do more to improve the North Richmond neighbourhood and we'll make sure the community is involved every step of the way."

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