

Media Release

Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier



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STATEWIDE ACTION PLAN TO SAVE LIVES AND REDUCE DRUG HARM

People struggling with chronic addiction deserve the best care and the best chance, wherever they live. That's why the Allan Labor Government is launching a Statewide Action Plan to save lives, reduce drug harms and give more people the care they need – in the CBD and across Victoria.

As part of the \$95.11 million Statewide Action Plan, the Government is responding to all the recommendations of the Lay Report, delivering on all but one of them and providing more support for services in the suburbs and regions.

The Government has always chosen a health-led approach to reduce drug harms. After establishing Victoria's first medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond, it supported the establishment of a second supervised injecting service in the CBD and began the detailed search for an appropriate location.

The Government has been unable to identify a suitable site that balances the needs of people who use drugs with the needs of the broader CBD community, so a second supervised injecting service won't proceed.

Drug harms touch every community – with around 90 per cent of overdose deaths involving heroin occurring outside the City of Melbourne. This is a statewide problem, and it calls for a statewide solution that also provides for Victoria's suburbs and regional centres and boosts services in areas where it's harder to access care.

The Statewide Action Plan does just that, starting with a much-needed increase in services of the most effective treatment option available to mitigate the problems that stem from opioid dependence: pharmacotherapy.

Pharmacotherapy is a life-changing medical treatment, but it's hard to access in many suburban and regional areas – and in some locations, availability is going backwards.

The Government will invest \$8.4 million to boost pharmacotherapy in up to 30 locations through a grants program targeting areas of high-demand or looming service gaps, allowing up to 1,500 more Victorians to access treatment.

Naloxone is a 'miracle' overdose reversal medicine – and under the statewide plan, 20 Naloxone vending machines will be trialled alongside existing needle exchanges so this completely safe medication can be more easily accessed at any time of day to help people in a life-or-death emergency.

The plan also trials a 'Never Use Alone' overdose prevention and response helpline which will provide anonymous care and advice – reducing overdose risk and ensuring emergency services can respond faster if needed.

Currently, cohealth provides assertive street outreach across the CBD. The plan continues and expands these teams and funds a trial of street outreach services in two new locations outside the CBD, to support more Victorians.

The plan also sees the appointment of Victoria's first Chief Addiction Adviser within the state's health system and starts the development of Victoria's first statewide strategy to address drug harms over the long-term.

Significant investment is needed to reduce drug harms in the CBD. That's why the Plan delivers a new community health service for the CBD – a place where anyone in the city can turn for treatment without judgement.

The Government will partner with cohealth to establish the new Community Health Hub, whose dedicated teams will offer help and medical care for anyone who walks through its doors at 244 Flinders St.

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The Hub will be a gateway for wraparound health and social support services and will provide comprehensive case management for the most vulnerable people when it opens in 2026.

It will also host a Victorian-first hydromorphone treatment trial for select participants identified by cohealth – diverting people from the illicit drug market and giving hope and care to the seriously addicted.

Research shows that participants of hydromorphone therapy experience high rates of retention in treatment, with sustained reductions in the use of illicit heroin and other drugs plus marked health and social improvements, including reductions in criminal activity.

Beyond the Hub, the plan also delivers wraparound services at the Salvation Army centre at 69 Bourke St – providing medical, nursing and mental health supports.

The plan also expands community outreach within the CBD – boosting the cohealth street teams who identify people in need and connect them to services, while also working with businesses and improving public amenity.

As part of a health-led approach to addressing drug harms in the city, multiple agencies, health providers and community will also come together in a CBD Reference Group to coordinate the local response.

The plan starts today. The Victorian Health Building Authority will immediately initiate design and procurement work for 244 Flinders St, and cohealth will scale up outreach services in the CBD now, with new locations to roll out after July 1. Work also starts today on changes required to support the Naloxone dispensing program.

Development of the Helpline, the enhanced case management model, and the broader governance, engagement, and strategy initiatives will start from July 1. The community pharmacotherapy grant program will open in 2024.

The Statewide Action Plan is a \$95 million investment in the health and wellbeing of Victorians that will save lives in the CBD, suburbs and regions – and it builds on services available at the existing Medically Supervised Injecting Room, which is an ongoing service that's open to those who need it.

The Government has also responded to the review conducted by Mr John Ryan of the existing Medically Supervised Injecting Room. From 1 July, North Richmond Community Health will enhance their current services at the facility in partnership with St Vincent's, Access Health and Community, and Your Community Health.

The reports handed down by Mr Ken Lay AO APM and Mr John Ryan can be viewed at www.health.vic.gov.au

Quote attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

"People struggling with addiction deserve our care wherever they are, and our statewide plan will save lives with a new community health service for the city while boosting support services in our suburbs and regions."

Quote attributable to Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt

"Pharmacotherapy is the most effective treatment option available – we'll boost it in up to 30 locations statewide, and we'll trial a new pharmacotherapy treatment within a clinical setting in the CBD to divert people from the illicit drug market and give hope to the seriously addicted."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"This plan will deliver a new community health hub for the CBD at 244 Flinders Street, with wraparound health, mental health and social support services for the CBD community."

Quote attributable to cohealth Chief Executive Nicole Bartholomeusz

"cohealth will work closely with the CBD community to provide increased access to health care in the heart of the city. Through our unwavering commitment to harm reduction we will work closely with the community, stakeholders, partners, the people who need our services and Government to deliver support to those who need it most, with compassion and expertise. Our aim is to build a healthier, safer, and more inclusive community for all."

Quote attributable to Commanding Officer of the Salvation Army Major Brendan Nottle

"We welcome the Allan Government's announcement that will provide significant support to the most vulnerable in the city & across the State. We believe these initiatives will genuinely help keep people alive."

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