

10/04/2017

Parliament of Victoria
Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues

**Re: Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment
(Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017**

Thankyou for the opportunity to address the central questions posed by the Terms of Reference on review and consideration of the:

1. Recommendations in Coroner Hawkins finding- Inquest into the death of Ms A, delivered on 20 February 2017 and other relevant reports
2. Nature and extent of current relevant regulations
3. And nature and extent of associated relevant policing policy

Opening in 2007 in the City of Yarra, the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) is the first and only community justice centre in Australia. Community justice centres are neighbourhood-focused centres that use the influence of the justice system to address local problems.

The NJC works with local Yarra residents and organisations to help prevent and reduce crime, improve public safety and increase confidence in, and access to the justice system. The NJC combines a multi-jurisdictional court with a variety of treatment and support services.

The NJC aims to reduce both the occurrence and impact of crime and other harmful behaviour through both our individual work with clients and our broader community development activities. The NJC's community development activities are aimed at increasing community capital to respond not only to crime, but also to important justice issues.

The City of Yarra has historically comprised a number of areas that are regarded as 'hotspots' for drug related activity. These hotspots have been sustained by the availability of illicit substances (most notably heroin) in the area, and has led to the City Of Yarra exerting a gravitational influence on the illicit substance using population. Heroin use continues to be a significant issue within the City of Yarra, recording the highest number of ambulance attendances for heroin-related overdoses of any local government area in Melbourne. (Dwyer, Power & Dietze, 2013). Within the City of Yarra the suburbs of Richmond and Abbotsford continue to have the majority of heroin related overdose ambulance attendances

The City of Yarra contains a number of long standing alcohol and other drug related treatment services who maintain significant organisational intelligence regarding current and emergent treatment/support needs for the illicit substance using population. The service types available in the City of Yarra include:

- Residential withdrawal programs

- Access to Pharmacotherapy programs
- Needle and Syringe programs
- Drug and Alcohol counselling/Care and Recovery Coordination

These services seek to provide access to all aspects of the service continuum for individuals with substance use disorders, however, access to them can often be onerous for the substance user to navigate. The NJC has sought to address this employing two dedicated alcohol and other drug clinicians in its treatment team (who are forensically accredited DHHS assessors) and making brokerage payments available to assist client's access drug treatment and support. This facet of the NJC model is unique in that similar court based programs (e.g. Drug Court of Victoria, Court Integrated Service Program) only provide access to brokerage for those who have already fallen into the justice net.

The NJC is also about to commence the piloting of an out posted Alcohol and Other Drug position to North Richmond Community Health Centre to increase availability of access to services for individuals in the Richmond area.

Recommendations

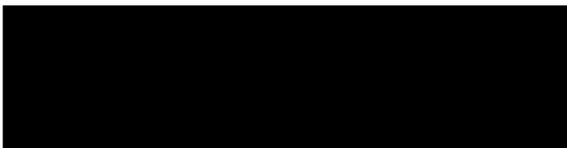
In response to the terms of Reference posed by the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues the following recommendations are posited for consideration

1. Introduction of an Integrated Health Facility including a Supervised Injecting Room- a medically supervised facility staffed by nurses and allied health staff (aod workers, mental health, and housing workers) where people who are planning to inject drugs are provided with sterile equipment and a safe place. The facilities are designed to respond not only to accidental overdoses, but offer a "one stop shop" of local agencies aimed at increasing access to a range of services relevant to substance user. A significant evidence basis exists for the effectiveness of supervised injecting facilities including reduced deaths from drug overdose, reduced ambulance call outs, improved client outcomes and increased referral into drug treatment programs (AMA Victoria Policy Paper 2012- A trial of Supervised Injecting facilities in Victoria)
2. Increased funding for street based assertive needles and syringe Alcohol and Other Drug workers. Currently, North Richmond Community Health Centre (NRCHC) provide Outreach Workers in the Richmond area. The workers frequently locate and attend to individuals who have overdosed and in need of immediate medical attention.
3. Increased access to Naloxone. Increasing the availability of Naloxone to members of the intravenous drug using community and associated front line service partners could decrease the mortality rates associated with overdoses in the City of Yarra. Programs such as the COPE program (Pennington Institute) provide for training of heroin users in the life saving medication, and could be broadened to include local stakeholders including Alcohol and Other Drug agencies, police, traders, general public.

4. Increased funding for Alcohol and Other Drug Services- Increased funding for community based programs such as counselling and “day hubs” (day residential rehabilitation programs), in conjunction with the creation of more residential rehabilitation beds, would assist with improving access to treatment and expedite referrals being accepted.
5. Increased pharmacotherapy providers. The City Of Yarra is serviced by a dedicated but small number of general practitioners who provide pharmacotherapies services to the community such as methadone and suboxone. Increased education targeted towards general practitioners about the benefits of prescribing pharmacotherapies for the client and community may increase the number of general practitioners that currently prescribe the medications
6. Increased education of heroin users around the dangers of using alone and the benefits of having another person with you to look after you in case.
7. Decriminalisation of minor amounts of substances – moving substance use to the sphere of public health issues that may decrease the fear of police detection and criminalisation thus reducing the covert substance using behaviours that place heroin users at risk as a result of discrete/hidden use in laneways, stairwells etc

In Conclusion we appreciate the opportunity to respond and would welcome the opportunity to start a further conversation about this immediate and pressing community issue within the City of Yarra.

Yours Respectfully



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Neighbourhood Justice centre, Collingwood

References

Dwyer, R., Power, R. & Diwetze, P. (2013). North Richmond Public Injecting Impact Study. Community Report. Melbourne: Burnett Institute.

AMA Victoria Policy Paper, (2012). A Trial of Supervised Injecting facilities in Victoria.

City of Yarra (2013). Health Plan 2013-2017. Yarra City Council.