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1 of 2 pages

Parliament of Victoria
Local and Social Issues Committee

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

Living Positive Victoria is a not for profit, community based organisation representing all people living with HIV in Victoria since 1988 and is committed to the advancement of human rights and wellbeing of all people living with HIV.

As you are aware, Fiona Patten MP recently introduced a draft bill to the Legislative Council to establish a pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in North Richmond. The purpose of the centre is to reduce drug harms relating to public injecting, including fatal and non-fatal overdose, the transmission of blood borne viruses (BBV) such as HIV and hepatitis C (HCV), and to provide referral pathways for drug users to social and support services.

According to the latest HIV Surveillance Report issued by the Department of Health and Human Services, 14 cases of HIV were associated with injecting drug use in Victoria in 2016.¹ The number of cases of HIV acquisition associated with injecting drug use in Victoria over the last three years total 20, 28 and 20 for 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively.² Furthermore, according to the Kirby Institute, in 2015 there were 2,402 cases of HCV diagnosed in Victoria.³ Approximately 90% of new HCV infections are related to the sharing of 'used' injecting equipment.⁴ These cases of HIV and HCV are entirely preventable.

Although not all of these cases are associated with public injecting, public injecting is associated with a higher risk of transmission of BBV.⁵ This risk is significantly higher for women. Structural gender inequality may mean that for heterosexual couples who inject, the female is often the second to inject using the same equipment their male partner just used.⁶ Higher risk of sexual transmission of HIV is associated with non-injecting female partners of injecting men, particularly if the female is unaware of their partner's injecting drug use practices.⁷ The establishment of one or more MSIC may reduce the incidence of both HIV and HCV (and/or HIV/HCV coinfection) associated with injecting drug use.

Over 90 MSIC or safe consumption rooms operate globally, including the highly successful centre in Sydney's Kings Cross. Multiple evaluations of the Sydney MSIC between 2004-2007 undertaken by the then National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (now called the Kirby Institute), have shown the Kings Cross facility to be highly effective in:

2 of 2 pages

- Reducing fatal and non-fatal overdoses;
- Increased access for people who inject drugs to social and health services; and
- Reducing the incidence of public injecting.^{8,9,10}

It is for these reasons that Living Positive Victoria supports the establishment of a MSIC pilot in North Richmond and also support similar facilities to be established in other Melbourne locations including but not limited to St Kilda, Footscray and Frankston.

JM

References:

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, 'HIV/AIDS Monthly Surveillance Report: December 2016', State of Victoria, 2017, <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/infectious-diseases-surveillance/search-infectious-diseases-data/hiv-aids-in-victoria-surveillance-report-for-december-2016>>, accessed 20 March 2017.

² Ibid.

³ The Kirby Institute, 'HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia: Annual Surveillance Report 2016', The Kirby Institute, UNSW Australia, Sydney, 2016, p. 69.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 'Alternatives to Public Injecting', Harm Reduction Coalition, New York, 2016.

⁶ See: Sotheran, J, et al., 1992; Dwyer, R, et al., 1994; Barnard, M, et al., 1993; Hindin, R, et al., 1992; etc. cited in: Secretariat of the Reference Group to the UN on HIV and Injecting Drug Use, 'Women who inject drugs: A review of their risks, experiences and needs', National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Australia, Sydney, 2010, p. 62.

⁷ Ibid, p. 49.

⁸ National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, 'Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre: Interim Report No. 1: Operation and Service Delivery', NSHECR, UNSW Australia, Sydney, 2005, pp. 27, 28.

⁹ Thomas, M, 'Sydney's Medically Supervised Injecting Centre', Parliament of Australia, 2010, <http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2010/September/Sydneys_Medically_Supervised_Injecting_Centre>, Accessed 20 February 2017.

¹⁰ Australian Drug Foundation, 'Supervised injecting facilities', Drug Info: ADF, 2017, <<http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/topics/supervised-injecting-facilities>>, Accessed 20 February 2017.