10 April 2017

Mr Patrick O'Brien
The Secretary
Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Via email: injectingcentrebill@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr O'Brien,

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

Thank you for your letter dated 23 March 2017 in relation to the inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017. The use and trade of illicit drugs in the City of Yarra is a significant health and safety issue for those engaged in drug use and for the broader community, affecting liveability, community connectedness and economic prosperity.

Council supports a harm minimisation approach in order to reduce the harms caused by illicit drug use. Council supports the recently tabled recommendations made by Coroner Hawkins as part of the inquest into the death of Ms A, including the establishment of a Supervised Injecting Facility (SIF) in the City of Yarra.

Council is committed to managing amenity impacts associated with illicit drug use, however we need the support of the State Government to prevent unnecessary deaths occurring in our municipality. I have witnessed firsthand the benefits associated with the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in Kings Cross which recently celebrated 15 years of running successfully with positive outcomes for clients and the community, with no overdose deaths.

Council urges the Victorian Government to act on the extensive evidence available that supports the establishment of a SIF as a means of reducing drug-related harm in our community, and calls on the Victorian Government to implement the recent recommendations made by Coroner Hawkins and to amend legislation to allow this to occur.

Should you require further information please contact Joanne Murdoch, Director Advocacy and Engagement on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Cr Amanda Stone
Mayor

Yarralink Interpreter Service 9280 1940 | Để được trợ giúp bằng Tiếng Việt, hãy gọi số 9280 1939 | Per assistenza in italiano chiamare 9280 1931 | Pour assistance en français appeler 9280 1939 | द्वारा हिंदी में सहायता लाने के लिए कैलिन 9280 1939 | Para ayuda en español llame al 9280 1935 | For help in mandarin call 9280 1936 | For assistance in other languages please call 9280 1938

المصايد باللغة العربية يوجد اتصال على الرقم 9280 1938

1 of 4
Illicit drug harms in the City of Yarra

An active street-based drug market has existed in Victoria Street for well over a decade, with people coming to the area from all over Melbourne to purchase and use illegal substances, predominantly heroin. Drug-related activity in the area including public injecting, discarded needles and syringes, and overdoses are ongoing concerns for residents and businesses. Council data shows that there are significantly higher proportions of people feeling unsafe in Abbotsford and North Richmond (the suburbs which Victoria Street runs through) compared to other parts of Yarra (Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey 2015, Planning for the Future Survey 2015).

Over the past five years, the City of Yarra has had the highest frequency of heroin-related ambulance attendances of any local government area in Victoria. For the 2014/2015 period there were 427 attendances in total (Ambooadstats 2016).

In 2015 there were 172 fatal heroin overdoses in Victoria. Of these, 20 occurred in the City of Yarra. Another 15 overdose deaths occurred outside of the City of Yarra, however evidence suggests that the heroin contributing to the deaths was purchased in the City of Yarra (Coroners Court of Victoria 2016, Court Reference: COR 2016 2418).

In 2015 over 60,000 syringes were collected across Yarra as a result of public injecting, with approximately 10,000 of these being unsafely disposed of in the public realm.

Council recently undertook a significant engagement process with the community regarding Victoria Street titled Re-imagining Victoria Street (refer to http://www.yoursayyarra.com.au/victoriastreet for more information) and asked the community to share their experiences of living, working and visiting Victoria Street, and their ideas for making it a safer, more attractive and welcoming place. Council received a substantial number of responses as part of the process, reflecting the high level of concern in the community and the strong desire to see positive outcomes for the Victoria Street precinct. Emerging issues from the data collated so far include poor amenity, safety concerns and issues arising from drug use (primarily dealing, public injecting, and discarded injecting equipment).

Council support for harm minimisation approaches

Reducing the harms of alcohol and other drugs in our community is a priority for Council. Acknowledging that people will continue to use illicit drugs within the City of Yarra, Council supports a
harm minimisation approach to seek to reduce the harm caused through drug use to individuals and the wider community.

Council’s Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2013-2017) prioritises community safety and reducing the harms from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and includes the following action:

- Advocate for the implementation of additional harm reduction strategies in Yarra as a means of improving public amenity, increasing perceptions of safety, and reducing drug related harm including supporting the peer administered naloxone program and advocating for supervised injecting facilities, extending the hours of needle and syringe programs, increasing outreach to people who inject drugs during evenings and weekends, enabling peer distributed needles and syringes, and installing syringe vending machines.

The North Richmond Public Injecting Impact Study (2013), undertaken by the Burnet Institute with the support of Council and the Yarra Drug and Health Forum, found that public injecting is widespread, frequent and highly visible in North Richmond and Abbotsford. The study provided a suite of evidence-based recommendations and some points of note are:

- That two recommendations from the study, the peer-distribution of sterile injecting equipment and peer-administered naloxone, were adopted by the State Government; and

- That the study also concluded that a supervised injecting facility would contribute to improved amenity and health by reducing overdoses and blood borne virus transmission, provide treatment pathways to clients, and reduce public injecting and the inappropriate disposal of injecting equipment.

Council supports all of the recently tabled recommendations made by Coroner Hawkins as part of the inquest into the death of Ms A, a 34-year-old who overdosed from heroin in Richmond. Coroner Hawkins recommends that the Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley take necessary steps to establish a trial of a SIF in North Richmond. Coroner Hawkins also recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services expand the availability of naloxone, review funding for services that support drug users and identify opportunities to improve injecting drug users’ access to and engagement with services.

**Medically Supervised Injecting Centre - Kings Cross**

In the past 30 years there have been more than 90 medically supervised injecting facilities established around the world, operating in 10 different countries. Evidence demonstrates that these are preventing deaths and creating pathways to treatment.
Like North Richmond and Abbotsford, the community of Kings Cross in Sydney faced a complex and uncomfortable problem of high visibility of heroin use, dealing and overdose deaths, and therefore high volumes of public injecting, inappropriately discarded syringes and related crime. Australia’s first and only Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in Kings Cross recently celebrated 15 years of running successfully with positive outcomes for clients and the community, with no overdose deaths in those 15 years.

Since the commencement of the MSIC in Kings Cross, there has been a demonstrable decline in the total number of discarded needles and syringes collected and reduced sightings of public injecting. A 2011 evaluation of the MSIC found that:

- More than 4,400 drug overdoses had been successfully managed without a single fatality;
- The number of publicly discarded needles and syringes in the Kings Cross area had been halved;
- The number of ambulance call outs to Kings Cross had decreased by 80 percent;
- More than 9,500 referrals to health and social welfare services had been generated; and
- Randomised surveys of local residents and business operators showed strong community support for the MSIC and that this had only trended upwards over time.

**Recommendations**

Whilst Council is committed to improving the amenity of Victoria Street, it has limited powers and responsibilities in other aspects including the measures recommended by Coroner Hawkins and others in the community. We are also committed to seeing a reduction in the harm from illicit street based drug use and need the support of the State Government to prevent unnecessary deaths occurring in our municipality.

Yarra City Council urges the Victorian Government to act on the extensive evidence available that supports the establishment of a SIF as a means of reducing drug-related harm in our community, and calls on the Victorian Government to implement the recent recommendations made by the Coroner Hawkins and to amend legislation to allow this to occur.