

Response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform

Victorian Government

August 2018

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Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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Foreword

The Victorian Government welcomes the report of the Victorian Parliamentary Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee's (the Committee) Inquiry into Drug Law Reform.

I would like to congratulate the Committee on this landmark inquiry – perhaps the most wide-ranging report into drug policy that this country has seen. I would also like to acknowledge the time and expertise of the individuals and organisations who provided evidence to the Inquiry. This comprehensive report will provide valuable intelligence for policymakers, researchers and government in the years to come.

When the Andrews Labor Government came to office, we knew that Victoria was facing an alarming escalation in the harms of ice, with our country towns and growth corridors especially strained. Our frontline services – paramedics, police officers, nurses, and doctors – were facing challenges on a scale they'd never seen before. We had an alcohol and other drug treatment system that wasn't working and was crying out for investment.

I'm proud that this government did not shrink from these problems.

We know that dealing with the complex challenge that is reducing the harm of drug use requires more than a law enforcement approach, although this is critical to prevent dealers taking advantage of vulnerable people. It also requires concerted efforts in prevention, harm reduction, and treatment. Since 2014-15, we've expanded funding for drug services by 57 per cent, with a record investment of \$259.9 million in 2018-19, meaning significantly more people have access to treatment. Through our *Ice Action Plan* and *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, we're doubling the number of residential rehabilitation beds across Victoria, providing an additional 700 Victorians access to high quality residential treatment each year.

Another significant reform of this government came into operation in June 2018, when we opened the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond to save lives.

This government is introducing our real-time prescription monitoring system, SafeScript – a comprehensive response to the growing harms from prescription medicines.

These investments reflect the government's understanding that we must approach drug use as a health issue, because tackling drug problems with law enforcement alone doesn't solve the issue. Providing better, earlier health interventions will help keep our communities safe, healthy, and together.

We hear this message clearly from law enforcement, from health professionals and from the community, and we have heard it again from the Inquiry into Drug Law Reform.

There is no doubt Australia is seeing its drug challenges diversify, with the misuse of pharmaceuticals and the emergence of potent synthetic drugs adding to the longstanding harms of drugs the community is more used to hearing about, such as heroin, and multi-substance use.

As the Committee acknowledged in its report, its recommendations are firmly focused on the long term, and many would have significant implications.

In the meantime, the government will continue to implement its significant investments to deliver better outcomes for Victorians. In 2018-19 we will see the commencement of SafeScript, tough new penalties for heroin trafficking and organised crime, and a further expansion of our roadside drug testing program. We'll also start work on new hubs for people in mental health or drug-related crisis, while exploring innovative new strategies to save Victorian lives.

We know there is more to do, and I look forward to working with our frontline services, families, and the community as we continue our efforts to minimise drug-related harm in Victoria.

Martin Foley MP
Minister for Mental Health

Overview of the Inquiry and Government Response

The Inquiry

The Victorian Parliamentary Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee tabled the report of the Inquiry into Drug Law Reform (the Inquiry) on 27 March 2018.

The terms of reference related to the laws, procedures and regulations regarding illicit, synthetic and prescription drugs, and reforms and practices adopted in other jurisdictions.

The Committee received 231 submissions and heard verbal evidence from 47 organisations and individuals.

The 600-page report contains 50 recommendations addressing legislation, policy and programs. The report emphasises the need to balance health and law enforcement approaches to drug use, with the recommendations largely focusing on health approaches over criminal responses.

The report contains a combination of action focused and exploratory recommendations. Most recommendations, as the report acknowledges, have financial implications. Many are multilayered, cross-portfolio and interdependent, consistent with the report's suggestion that Victoria's drug policy should be integrated, responsive and performance-oriented.

Finally, the report notes that policies and programs to minimise drug-related harm in Victoria are contingent on increased community understanding and awareness on drug issues – particularly de-stigmatising drug use and drug dependence, in order to better support and help people who use drugs.

Government Response

This Response is provided for tabling in accordance with the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*, which requires that the Government respond to parliamentary committee reports within six months.

The Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee has produced a report that is strongly oriented toward the long term, and this comprehensive report will be a useful resource for policymakers in the years to come.

The Government notes that many of our key drug-related investments were commended in the report, reflecting that our efforts so far are meeting community need and aligned to the findings of this Inquiry. However, the Government maintains its clear position against changes such as pill testing and decriminalisation of drugs.

The Response is structured around three key themes, which reflect this Government's overarching vision for minimising drug-related harm, as well as the significant investments, efforts and achievements of the past four years:

- Better, earlier treatment
- Saving lives and preventing harm
- Safer communities.

Each chapter also identifies a number of future priorities and initiatives that Victorians can expect to see delivered from 2018-19.

Better, earlier treatment

We know it's critical to invest in quality drug treatment services. These services support people suffering from addiction issues to get the help they need.

Over the past four years the Victorian Government has rolled out a major expansion of treatment services in key communities across the state, including specialist Aboriginal and family violence clinicians. Through our *Ice Action Plan* and *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, we're connecting people with support earlier and helping families find the right services when their loved ones need them most.

At the same time, we're cracking down on unscrupulous private providers who try to profit from Victorians when they're at their most vulnerable.

We know that treatment is a crucial aspect of reducing the harms of drug use in our community, and acknowledge the need to include it as a central part of the government's response. We'll continue to pursue better outcomes for people who need help addressing their drug use. This includes by introducing Emergency Department Crisis Hubs, helping people find quality treatment services, and driving better, person-centred provider performance through better data.

Expanding access to treatment

Residential rehabilitation

The Victorian Government is more than doubling the number of residential rehabilitation beds in Victoria. Once all new facilities are fully operational, the Government will have increased the number of residential rehabilitation beds available to the Victorian community from 208 in 2014-15 to 450.

Recognising the urgent need for expanded access to residential rehabilitation, the 2015-16 State Budget supported the establishment of 32 new beds across a range of existing services.

As part of the *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, we allocated \$53.2 million over four years to support the rapid delivery of an additional 100 beds. These beds, now operational, include delivery of new beds in existing Melbourne-based services with \$8.7 million in funding from the 2017-18 State Budget.

Twenty-eight of the beds are part of a new specialist dual diagnosis service that provides clients with alcohol and other drug rehabilitation services as well as enhanced support for mental health issues. In addition, the Plan will pilot a new residential withdrawal and stabilisation service, providing intensive, integrated treatment to support clients impacted by multiple life complexities.

Through the *Ice Action Plan*, over \$56 million will go towards delivering new facilities in the Grampians, Gippsland, Barwon and Hume regions. \$6.7 million over four years will operationalise the 20-bed Grampians facility from October 2018. The three remaining 30-bed facilities will be the Government's first purpose-built residential rehabilitation facilities, set to open in 2020-21.

The introduction of new treatment models, plus the significant expansion of residential rehabilitation beds across the state will mean around 700 more people across Victoria will be able to access treatment per year. This will reduce pressure on the system and improve access to treatment for people who may struggle to attend community-based services.

More than half of the new beds will be based in regional Victoria, which means more Victorians will have residential treatment options closer to their homes and families.

This unprecedented expansion represents a continuing partnership with our service providers to improve health and wellbeing across the Victorian community.

Unlocking access to treatment

It's essential to make sure our system works for Victorians right from the start of their treatment journey. In July 2017, following extensive consultation, we implemented changes to the community-based alcohol and other drug treatment system to improve access for clients.

Working closely with providers, we shifted responsibility for conducting assessment and treatment planning from intake providers to treatment providers. This change has allowed clients to build a relationship with a treatment provider earlier – reducing the number of times they've got to tell their story. To support these new arrangements, we refreshed screening and assessment tools and rolled out training to clinicians across the state.

Keeping families together, reducing overdose, preventing crime

Responding to unavoidable demand for treatment has been a key priority for this Government, resulting in funding boosts for community-based alcohol and other drug services. This includes an \$18 million investment in new day rehabilitation services across the state, which since October 2015 have provided up to 500 additional places in treatment each year, with a particular focus on regional Victoria.

The Government recognises that targeted community-based treatment is a good investment that can prevent complex social problems from getting worse. In 2017-18, we committed significant new funding to provide stronger access to treatment services. This included:

- **Family reunification:** \$17 million over four years to provide treatment for up to 3,800 parents each year to help them meet court requirements and reunify their families
- **Overdose:** \$12.4 million over four years to provide additional support to treatment clients who may be at high risk of overdose, particularly when they're at key transition points in their treatment journey
- **Community corrections:** 960 new treatment places per year for people on community correction orders to get back on their feet. This specialist support seeks to address the relationship between a participant's substance use and their offending, preventing crime and protecting the community.

These expanded services commenced in March 2018 and are now operational statewide.

Specialist support for Aboriginal communities

Recognising that drugs can have a disproportionate effect on Aboriginal communities, through the 2017-18 State Budget we invested \$14.1 million to employ 34 Aboriginal health workers to provide specialist treatment for Aboriginal Victorians facing alcohol and drug addiction.

This is in addition to the expansion of Aboriginal Metropolitan Ice Partnerships, which provide assertive outreach, support and clinical intervention for local community members affected by ice addiction.

Specialist support to respond to family violence

In response to recommendations from the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence, the 2017-18 Budget provided \$17.3 million to embed specialist family violence advisors within AOD treatment providers on an ongoing basis.

The advisors will provide family violence expertise to the organisation, workers and other service providers in their area to improve identification and treatment of both survivors and perpetrators of family violence.

Helping families

Families are often the informal care and support system for people using drugs. The stress and stigma associated with their loved one's drug use can be significant, and the behavioural changes that can develop as a result can be very distressing. For families with loved ones struggling with addiction, getting access to treatment can be very stressful. Knowing where to turn for help and support can reduce the harm and strain for many families.

In 2015 we introduced the 1800 ICE ADVICE Line and allocated \$4.7 million over three years to roll out our *BreakThrough Ice Education for Families* sessions, equipping families and communities to identify and support people affected by ice.

Our 2017 *Drug Rehabilitation Plan* has provided a new phase of investment, delivering \$3.3 million for a new advice service to provide more practical support and brokerage for families trying to urgently locate treatment services for their loved ones. The new 'AOD Pathways Service' commenced in April 2018 and is already providing enhanced assistance to individuals and families seeking treatment.

Lifting the quality of treatment

In recent years, with growing pressure on our public system, some unscrupulous private providers have sought to capitalise on vulnerable families' desire to find a treatment place for their loved one. The Government is making these providers accountable, empowering consumers and sending a clear signal that quality, safety and fair treatment must be the key features of Victoria's drug rehabilitation sector.

Cracking down on poor quality, unsafe providers

Vulnerable families are better protected from poor quality, unsafe private treatment providers, with the Victorian Health Complaints Commissioner receiving new resources to investigate complaints in 2017. Amendments to the *Health Complaints Act 2016* provided the Health Complaints Commissioner with new powers to take action against unethical and dangerous health providers, including alcohol and other drug treatment (AOD) providers. As part of the *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, \$550,000 over 18 months will build the Commissioner's capacity to monitor and investigate complaints about sub-standard AOD providers.

Making detox safer

Some stages of the treatment journey can present very serious health risks if poorly managed. This is particularly true of the detoxification phase: acute withdrawal from alcohol or other drugs can be dangerous, with a risk of death. Withdrawal services should therefore be conducted in a suitable environment, with oversight from appropriately qualified medical practitioners and nursing staff.

In 2017, following consultation, the Government found strong support to regulate these services via the *Health Services (Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres) Regulations 2013*.

From 1 July 2018 all private overnight residential withdrawal services have been required to be operated in a registered private hospital. Premises that do not register with the Department of Health and Human Services may choose to no longer offer residential withdrawal services and to simply continue to offer rehabilitation services.

A three-month transition period has commenced, during which the department will support services to bring their facility into compliance with the legislation. Any services providing overnight residential withdrawal services will be required to be compliant by 1 October 2018.

A National Quality Framework

On top of work that's rolling out statewide, Victoria has pushed hard for a national approach to treatment quality. Work is nearly complete on the development of a *National Quality Framework* for alcohol and

other drug treatment providers. Once finalised, we will mandate the framework for all Victorian Government-funded treatment services.

Training and support for frontline workers

Health workers on the frontline have been under significant pressure in recent years. As we grow our service system, we need to ensure our health workforce can access specialist expertise, build a career and work safely to achieve good outcomes for clients.

Responding to ice

The Ice Action Plan has increased training and supervision to better equip frontline workers to respond to ice-related harms. In total we've invested \$6.5 million to provide online, face-to-face, and accredited training courses for frontline workers, expand clinical supervision for mental health and alcohol and other drug workers, and enable workers to better meet the needs of vulnerable population groups, including Aboriginal people. Each year up to 9,700 frontline workers are receiving face-to-face training and 2,500 are receiving clinical supervision. More than 11,000 people have registered to use the online training package.

Growing the workforce to meet demand

To support the expansion of alcohol and other drug services announced through the 2017-18 State Budget and the *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, the Government is providing \$2.5 million over 12 months to deliver an immediate workforce lift through attraction and training initiatives.

This includes \$450,000 for 20 drug and alcohol nursing scholarships and extra training, further growing this specialist workforce and ensuring the best treatment and care for people who need help. The Government is actively working to attract new people and supporting development activities for residential rehabilitation workers, ensuring these services' workforces can keep pace as new facilities come online.

Medicinal cannabis

This Government came to office with a clear commitment to enabling the manufacture and supply of safe and high quality medicinal cannabis products in Victoria. Victoria subsequently became the first Australian jurisdiction to commit to the implementation of legal access pathways for medicinal cannabis. Our leadership in this area was an important catalyst for the national approach that is now in place.

As a result, any doctor in Victoria is now able to prescribe medicinal cannabis for any patient with any condition, where appropriate approvals are in place.

Victoria is now supporting the next steps for a streamlined national approach to medicinal cannabis access, as outlined below.

Future directions – treatment

Better responses for people in mental health and drug crisis

In the 2018-19 Budget the Government provided \$100.45 million over four years to establish new 'hubs' in six Melbourne hospitals to better support and respond to people experiencing a crisis related to their mental health or substance use.

People in crisis are presenting to our emergency departments in increasing numbers, but it can be very challenging to provide quality care and effective service pathways to people when they're in acute distress. The hubs will provide thorough assessments and brief therapeutic interventions. They will be staffed by a range of medical, mental health, and social work professionals, as well as security personnel.

The crisis hubs will be established in a dedicated area of each hospital's emergency department. This is important because waiting for long periods in high-stimulus environments can exacerbate mental health crises, sometimes causing further distress for the patient, those in the beds around them, visitors, and hospital staff.

The hubs will provide a better response for vulnerable people in our hospitals, create lasting service pathways to improve patients' chances of recovery in the community, and relieve pressure on our emergency departments and frontline workers.

Driving treatment quality and empowering consumers

As part of our ongoing commitment to lifting quality in Victoria's alcohol and other drug service sector, in 2018-19 the Government will release new tools to support informed choice of quality alcohol and other drug services. These resources will engage consumers early, providing clear advice on what to look for in a treatment provider while ensuring information on how and when to make a complaint is readily available.

2018-19 will also see implementation of the National Quality Framework for alcohol and other drug treatment, with Victoria's initial focus on making the new standards compulsory via our service agreements with funded providers.

Medicinal cannabis

Making access simpler and quicker

Victoria will continue to support national efforts to simplify appropriate access to medicinal cannabis products. We and other states and territories are working with the Commonwealth's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to develop a single, nationally consistent online application pathway to access unregistered medicinal cannabis products. This platform will enable prescribers to submit the necessary Commonwealth and state/territory applications at the same time. Once the new platform is operational, complete applications are expected to be processed within 48 hours.

We're also supporting patients and practitioners to understand the effective clinical uses of medicinal cannabis products. Victoria has contributed to national work on a series of clinical guidance documents developed by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre. The guidance produced so far has been published on the TGA's website. Resources will be added and updated as the evidence base develops.

Building the evidence base

It's important to keep improving the research base for medicinal cannabis products to understand their full potential. The Government is currently developing a register and network of key clinical and research stakeholders, cataloguing existing medicinal cannabis clinical trials in Victoria and identifying sources of clinical research funding. Agriculture Victoria is exploring clinical trial partnerships with suitable research organisations.

Understanding alcohol and drug issues in culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Victoria is Australia's most culturally diverse state, with around half of all Victorians being either born overseas or having a parent born overseas. The Victorian Government understands that our multicultural community presents specific health and wellbeing challenges. This is no different when it comes to substance use – but at present, there is limited evidence on drug issues and attitudes in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

In 2018-19, the Government will commence a new program of research to better understand the prevalence of drug use in Victoria's CALD communities. Working in partnership with communities, this program of research will generate practical options to break down the stigma of substance use in CALD communities, identify drug harm prevention opportunities, and improve service access and responsiveness.

Driving better treatment outcomes with data

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Collection (VADC) is a new way of collecting data and reporting on activity that takes place within Victoria's AOD treatment system. The new collection replaces the Alcohol and Drug Information System (ADIS).

The VADC aims to streamline current reporting, with a smaller number of essential, performance oriented data items. This approach will allow Government and our funded sector to understand how clients travel through treatment services and, by improving data quality, allow for more accurate assessment of system performance and client trends.

The VADC will ultimately become the cornerstone of quality, efficient and person-centred service delivery in Victoria's treatment system. Over time, the Government will harness this valuable intelligence to help us prevent entrenched drug dependence, and improve outcomes for our clients and for the community.

The department has provided service providers with \$1.32 million to assist them to upgrade to VADC-compliant systems. All in-scope service providers are required to be collecting VADC-compliant data by 1 October 2018.

Saving lives and preventing harm

All lives have value. We have to acknowledge the reality of drug use and recognise that the path to recovery can be difficult. It starts by treating people with dignity when they're struggling with addiction, meeting them where they are, and empowering them to make healthier choices.

Our communities will be safer for all Victorians thanks to this Government's investment in services that reduce the harms of drug use. In 2018-19 the Government will invest a record \$20 million in harm reduction. This includes services we've rolled out that are already saving lives, and is in addition to funding committed to support the new Medically Supervised Injecting Room in North Richmond.

Looking forward, the Government will consider ways to further simplify access to the overdose reversal medicine naloxone and empower peers to help reduce harm on the frontline.

Medically Supervised Injecting Room in North Richmond

Heroin deaths are at their highest point in almost 20 years. This health emergency is concentrated around North Richmond in the City of Yarra. Local families, first responders, medical experts, and the people who witness this devastation on their streets every day have told us something needs to be done. We have listened.

On 19 December 2017, the Victorian Parliament passed legislation for a trial of a medically supervised injecting room, to be operated by medical practitioners at North Richmond Community Health.

The North Richmond Community Health supervised injecting room is modelled on the successful centre at Sydney's Kings Cross. In its 16 years of operation, it has managed more than 7,000 overdoses without a single death. It has also halved the number of discarded needles in the community, reduced ambulance call outs, and importantly has not seen an increase in local crime or drug use.

Our priority is making sure the community surrounding North Richmond Community Health is kept safe. That's why we will have security stationed at the supervised injecting room during all opening hours and Victoria Police will continue their patrols of the area. Additional CCTV and lighting is also being rolled out throughout the area to deter and respond to crime.

Reducing overdose

Overdose is preventable. However, tragically, Victoria has seen drug-related deaths grow across the state in recent years. There were 477 overdose deaths in Victoria in 2016, an increase of 26 per cent since 2009. The vast majority of these were accidental.

This Government has overseen a significant expansion in Victoria's overdose prevention services, allocating an additional \$3.2 million between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

Naloxone Subsidy Initiative

Naloxone is a medicine that temporarily reverses the effects of opioid overdose. It is a safe, effective and best practice intervention for preventing opioid related deaths. The Naloxone Subsidy Initiative (NSI) provides grants to needle and syringe program outlets to ensure that naloxone can be provided to their clients at no charge. 21 providers work across 28 locations to deliver this initiative. Results from the first six months have been very encouraging:

- Over 1,400 Victorians received training in how to prevent, recognise and respond to overdose, including using naloxone
- Over 1,000 Victorians had the medicine dispensed to them, representing approximately 5000 individual doses of naloxone

- Over 150 overdoses were reversed by members of the community using naloxone – representing up to 150 lives saved.

Reducing drug harms in Victoria’s drug hotspots

In addition to the statewide Naloxone Subsidy Initiative, the Government has expanded its investment in six local government areas with significant concentrations of drug-related harm: Brimbank/Maribyrnong, Greater Dandenong, Greater Geelong, City of Melbourne, City of Port Phillip, and City of Yarra.

This includes \$1.1 million in funding to support the **Peer-led Networks Trial**, in which peer workers draw on their local knowledge and experience of drug use to identify people at risk of overdose and provide support to those who may not want to utilise mainstream supports. The trial is due to conclude in 2018-19 and will be evaluated by Penington Institute.

We’ve also provided \$1.5 million so far to develop a new **Proactive Overdose Response** to personally follow up people who have survived an overdose. Research shows overdose survivors are especially vulnerable to further overdose, which is why we’ve created new capacity for frontline health workers to reach out to overdose survivors and connect them with supports that could prevent a future and potentially fatal recurrence.

Reducing the risks of pharmaceutical misuse

SafeScript: Victoria’s real-time prescription monitoring system

As with the rest of Australia, in recent years Victoria has experienced a significant increase in the harms arising from the misuse of pharmaceuticals – particularly addiction and overdoses from opioid painkillers and benzodiazepines (among others). Tragically, in 2016, 78 per cent of overdose deaths in Victoria involved a pharmaceutical drug.

In 2016-17, the Government allocated \$29.5 million plus \$2.8 million ongoing to implement a real-time prescription monitoring system for Victoria.

SafeScript will allow prescribers and pharmacists to access a medication supply history of certain high risk medicines for their patients at the time of consultation which is updated in real-time. The system will provide prescribers and pharmacists with a clinical tool to make safer decisions about whether to prescribe or dispense high-risk medicines, and facilitate early identification, treatment and support for patients who are developing signs of dependence.

SafeScript will be accompanied by a range of initiatives to support and prepare patients and health professionals for the implementation of SafeScript. These will include:

- comprehensive training for prescribers and pharmacists focussed on enhancing clinical skills;
- additional peer to peer support for general practitioners;
- a public awareness campaign; and
- minor enhancements to the AOD treatment system, which form part of the Victorian Government’s broader funding boost for drug services.

SafeScript will be available to clinicians in late 2018. The supporting initiatives are on track to be available when SafeScript is implemented later this year in Western Victoria. The Government will assess core components, such as the training and workforce packages, so they can be adjusted accordingly prior to statewide implementation in early 2019.

Eliminating blood-borne viruses

Through the release of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C strategies, the Victorian Government has committed to eliminating new transmissions of HIV and eliminating hepatitis B and C as public health concerns by 2030.

This will require an ongoing commitment to Victoria's Needle and Syringe Program (NSP), targeted investment to provide access to leading-edge treatments, and an overarching commitment to end HIV and viral hepatitis-related stigma and discrimination.

Strengthening Victoria's Needle and Syringe Program

Under the *Ice Action Plan*, the 2015-16 Budget committed an additional \$1.8 million over four years to expand access to Victoria's Needle and Syringe Program (NSP), which is an essential part of our public health infrastructure. This new funding provided:

- \$600,000 over four years for one-off grants to increase after-hours access to 20 high volume NSP services; and
- \$1.2 million over four years to provide part-time staffing at eight busy secondary NSP services.

Reducing viral hepatitis

Between 2016-17 and 2018-19 the Government has invested \$1.8 million in new funding to address viral hepatitis. A further \$1.3 million was released in the 2017-18 State Budget to expand the hepatitis B vaccination program to vaccinate an additional 10,000 Victorians.

The Government has also established the Victorian HIV Hepatitis Integrated Teaching and Learning (VHHITAL) program at approximately \$1.1million over three years (2016-17 to 2018-2019). VHHITAL is a workforce capacity building program offering free accredited training in the assessment, treatment and management of blood borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections to general practitioners, pharmacists and nurses.

Preventing HIV transmission

To prevent HIV transmissions in Victoria, between 2016 and 2018 the Government invested new funding of \$1.9 million in a pre-exposure prophylaxis – or PrEP – public health research study (PrEPX). PrEP is an anti-viral pill for HIV prevention and, when taken daily, is 99% effective at preventing HIV.

The Government has also strengthened Victoria's HIV response by providing \$2.3 million in funding over four years to the *PRONTO!* rapid HIV testing service, supporting service expansion and outreach activities.

Supporting the search for a cure for HIV

In June 2017, the Victorian Government announced \$1.2 million in funding to the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity to establish an HIV cure research consortium with the goal of developing a cure for HIV.

Future directions – saving lives

SafeScript rollout

As noted above, SafeScript, Victoria's real-time prescription monitoring system, will be available to clinicians from late 2018. SafeScript will be Australia's most comprehensive response to the growing misuse of prescription medicines.

Simplifying access to naloxone

Victoria has had good success with our efforts so far to increase community access to naloxone. It is an extremely safe and effective medicine, has no potential for misuse, and has no effect on someone who hasn't consumed opioids.

Health workers on the frontline are telling us that by freeing up the regulatory requirements around naloxone dispensing, we can maximise the life-saving potential of this medicine and allow our workforce to use its time more efficiently. This will lift service capacity for the whole community.

In 2018-19 the Government will develop options to allow health workers in registered needle and syringe programs to directly dispense naloxone to clients who are at risk of, or may witness, an opioid overdose. This change will bring Victoria into line with NSW and leading overseas jurisdictions.

Enabling peers to reduce harm

As we've seen through our Peer-Led Networks Trial, we know that people with lived experience of drug use can make an invaluable contribution to the health of our community, reducing harm and connecting with people who would otherwise remain beyond the reach of traditional services.

In 2018-19 the Government will develop options to further enable peers to deliver valuable health interventions for the community. This will include options to enhance the role of peers in naloxone programs, as well as the removal of the outdated restriction on peer distribution of sterile injecting equipment.

A new framework for our harm reduction services

This Government has overseen a significant expansion of services that will save lives and reduce harm. It is therefore timely to set a consistent strategic direction for these services. In 2018-19, the Government will develop a new framework for our funded harm reduction sector, with the aim of establishing a new set of shared objectives and principles for these services. The framework will also give us opportunity to make sure Victoria's longstanding NSP is working as effectively as possible as we work to eliminate blood-borne viruses.

Better information sharing following overdoses at events

Illicit substances in Australia are becoming more potent and diverse, and we know that there are events where young people are especially exposed to these risks.

In 2018-19 the Government will pilot a more coordinated response to overdose incidents at public events. This will include information-sharing among health and law enforcement agencies after ambulance officers attend a cluster of drug-related incidents at a public event.

Safer communities

Keeping Victorians safe is the Government's top priority. We are coming down hard on the criminals who seek to distribute harmful drugs, particularly in large quantities, throughout our communities. We're also investing heavily to keep our roads safe from drug-affected drivers.

At the same time, the Government recognises that there are often complex issues that underlie drug-related offending. We've invested in targeted therapeutic interventions through our justice system that we know can help break cycles of offending, which improves community safety.

Looking forward, tough new trafficking penalties will soon come online, as well as further increases in roadside drug testing. In 2018-19 the Government will also develop a new therapeutic justice model and examine options to increase safety at music festivals and events.

A tougher stance on drug trafficking

This Government has acted decisively to target drug traffickers with measures that aim to stifle the availability of illicit drugs, including to some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Protecting children and others vulnerable to drug dealers

In 2016 the Government introduced offences that increase the maximum penalties (by a further 5 years' imprisonment) for people who deal drugs to a minor or anyone else at or within 500 metres of a school. These changes seek to protect children from the risk of exploitation by drug dealers or from witnessing drug trafficking.

At the same time, new laws were made to protect those who may otherwise be intimidated into dealing drugs, by making it an offence to coerce another person to traffic drugs by threatening harm or violence. This legislation also created the offences (with penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment) of possessing or publishing instructions on how to make illicit drugs, and – as a property owner or occupier – intentionally permitting another person to use land or premises for trafficking or cultivating illicit drugs.

Targeting the most harmful drugs

The Government has taken strong action to control the proliferation of ice in Victorian communities. In 2017 the Government legislated to reduce the threshold quantities of ice that constitute trafficking, strengthening the deterrent to dealing this substance and enabling courts to impose higher penalties in a greater range of ice trafficking cases.

In 2017 the Government also legislated a blanket ban on the sale and supply of new synthetic drugs. These drugs were often marketed as mimicking the effects of other existing illicit substances. The new laws have shifted away from listing specific banned substances by their chemical composition to instead capture substances based on their effect or purported psychoactive effect. This recognises the need to change our response based on how quickly new synthetic drugs with different chemical compounds can be developed.

The harms of heroin remain of great concern for Victoria. As part of our 2017 *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, the Government committed to increasing penalties for commercial heroin trafficking. The government introduced these reforms to Parliament in June 2018.

Tackling organised crime

The Government recognises that organised crime groups have greater capacity to arrange the trafficking of large quantities of drugs. Under our 2017 *Drug Rehabilitation Plan* the Government committed to developing reforms that target drug trafficking by these groups. The government introduced legislation to

Parliament in June 2018 to create a new offence (with penalties of up to life imprisonment) of commercial trafficking carried out for the benefit of, or at the direction of, organised crime. The new laws will also have provisions for property to be confiscated, to prevent organised criminals profiting from drug trafficking.

In addition, in 2015-16, \$4.4 million was allocated over four years to expand Victoria Police's Forensic Drug Branch, to increase drug profiling and intelligence capability. This project has achieved a 40 per cent improvement in capacity, including greater analysis capacity and decreased turnaround times.

The Government has also recently changed the law to provide protective service officers (PSOs) with the power to conduct searches for drugs of dependence without a warrant. The new powers, which commenced in April 2018, support PSOs to target crime and anti-social behaviour, while helping people feel safe and confident to use public transport.

Solving entrenched drug use through our justice system

The Government is well aware that there can be a complex relationship between drug dependence and offending. The evidence shows that investing in therapeutic interventions through our courts can help solve the entrenched and persistent addictions that contribute to offending.

In recognition of this, the Government has invested heavily in diversionary programs aimed at breaking the cycle of drug dependence and associated offending. The Government is also funding numerous programs in forensic settings to help people convicted of drug offense to resolve their drug dependency and avoid the risk of them engaging in serious and/or repeat offending.

Expanding the Drug Court model

The Drug Court is a division of the Magistrates' Court, which was established in Dandenong in 2002. It aims to divert drug offenders from the criminal justice system by offering them a final chance to get treatment and to stay drug and crime free – failing which they may face prison. In 2016-17 the Government invested \$32 million to establish a new division of the Victorian Drug Court in Melbourne, so more people can benefit from the diversionary options offered when their drug dependency is linked to their crime. The Melbourne Drug Court opened in March 2017 and is giving participants the opportunity to confront the underlying causes of their addiction.

Extending the trial of the Family Drug Treatment Court

The Government has committed funding of \$1.4 million in 2017-18 and \$3.9 million in 2018-19 to extend the trial of the Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC) at the Broadmeadows Children's Court. The FDTC was established in 2014 as a pilot program with the aim of helping parents to stop using drugs and alcohol, and to promote family reunification. It diverts eligible parents from the normal court process into a 12-month program involving regular court attendance, and drug treatment and testing. The FDTC supports families to address the underlying cause of the family breakdown, whilst avoiding more punitive court-imposed sanctions that could make family reunification more difficult.

Expanding the Court Integrated Services Program

The Government provided \$23.9 million in the 2017-18 Budget to increase the capacity of the Court Integrated Services Program, in order to meet growing demand in the Magistrates' Court. This program strengthens the bail system, through increased monitoring, treatment and supervision of offenders on bail to confront the underlying causes of offending, and has proven effective in reducing reoffending. The program's Remand Outreach Pilot will be continued and expanded to an additional prison to target repeat offenders on remand.

Community-based programs for offenders

As part of 2015-16 reforms to strengthen Community Correctional Services, the Government has introduced a new adult forensic service delivery model. This new model – a collaboration between the AOD and community corrections sectors, as well as Government agencies – is increasing access to, and efficacy of, AOD treatment for offenders on community based orders.

Targeted drug treatment in prisons

The 2017-18 Budget also allocated \$7.6 million as part of a wider initiative to reduce reoffending. This funding will help to better identify prisoners in need of AOD support and provide additional programs to them, targeting in particular those on remand or short sentences, as well as Koori prisoners.

Programs include those which aim to increase participants' awareness of the health impacts of alcohol and other drugs, and those which aim to address the link between participants' substance use and offending behaviour, in order to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Addressing serious threats to public safety

In 2017 the Government provided funding of \$31.6 million to establish the Victorian Fixated Threat Assessment Centre. The centre, a joint early intervention initiative between Victoria Police and forensic mental health services, aims to provide a structured and coordinated approach to respond to serious threats posed by people that could result in terrorism or perpetration of extreme violence. Specialist mental health and alcohol and other drug services will engage high-risk people so they receive appropriate and timely treatment. The Centre commenced operation in February 2018.

Reducing AOD-related road trauma

The Government is investing in a range of initiatives to deal with alcohol and drug impaired drivers on our roads. We're increasing the number of roadside drug and alcohol tests and increasing penalties for those who get caught.

Getting drug and drink drivers off our roads

In 2015-16 this Government provided \$15 million to expand police capacity to identify intoxicated drivers and remove them from Victorian roads. This additional investment supported the purchase of 10 new drug and booze buses and maintained roadside drug screening at 100,000 tests per year. The 2018-19 Budget has built on the additional capacity provided by these buses, allocating \$25.6 million to increase the number of roadside drug tests from 100,000 to 150,000 in the first year and maintain that level for a further year.

Victoria is also leading a major inter-jurisdictional research program to identify and guide road and policing authorities on opportunities to optimise drug-testing regimes and associated drug-driving program activities, with a focus on improving the cost-efficiency and deterrent effectiveness.

Victoria has introduced a compulsory Behaviour Change Program for people who commit a drug-driving offence. With a greater emphasis on health behaviours, the program will assist drug-drivers to reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

Greater penalties to deter drug and drink driving

The Government has increased and brought consistency to the penalties that apply (including licence suspensions) to drink and drug drivers. A new offence was also introduced in 2017 for refusing a roadside drug test. Victoria's road safety agencies have accompanied the introduction of these new offences and increased penalties with television, billboard, and social media advertising.

Future directions – safer communities

New offences, tougher penalties for drug trafficking

As signalled in the *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*, the Government introduced legislative amendments in Parliament in June 2018 to increase sentences for commercial-scale heroin trafficking and to add a new serious offence for traffickers who are involved with organised crime. These tough new laws are expected to come into effect within the next 12 months.

Further enhancing road safety

From 2018-19, following a new investment of \$25.6 million, roadside drug tests will be increased by a further 50,000 per year.

Enhancing therapeutic justice

The 2018-19 Budget provided \$1.161 million to develop a new therapeutic justice model.

Music festival safety

As noted in the *Community Safety Statement 2018-19*, the Government will examine an appropriate role for Victoria Police in the planning of events such as music festivals.

Drug diversion programs

Victoria Police is currently developing a new Drug Response Plan, and is also undertaking a project to strengthen its diversion programs.

Appendix 1 – Achievements under the Government’s *Ice Action Plan* and *Drug Rehabilitation Plan*

Ice Action Plan – Stages 1-3

Initiative	Key components	Achievements
Stage 1 – Victorian Budget 2015-16 – \$45.5 million		
Expand drug treatment services with a focus on rural rehabilitation	\$18 million to expand services particularly in rural and regional Victoria, and establish innovative models of non-residential rehabilitation	New innovative therapeutic day rehabilitation treatment services are now providing up to 500 people with access to treatment each year across nine services, including seven in regional Victoria (Mildura, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Geelong, Shepparton, Moe and Ballarat)
New drug and booze buses	\$15 million for 10 new drug and booze buses to improve road safety, and additional random roadside drug tests	Victoria Police completed 100,000 roadside drug screening tests in 2017-18
Support for families and communities	\$4.7 million for training and family support services, including an innovative family support program delivered statewide and available to over 1,000 Victorians each year	The 1800 Ice Advice Line has received over 5,000 calls since it commenced in 2015 Around 1,500 people are participating in the Breakthrough: Ice Education for Families program each year. Through this program, families in need are getting help to recognise when there is a problem and what to do
Cracking down on clandestine drug labs	\$4.5 million to expand Victoria Police’s Forensic Drug Branch to increase drug profiling and intelligence capability	The project has achieved a 40 per cent improvement in capacity, including greater analysis capacity and decreased turnaround times
Expand investment in Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs)	\$1.8 million to provide grants to 20 high-need locations to reduce harm to injecting ice users and the wider community	Over 20 sites have received funding grants to expand after-hour access to needle and syringe programs
Expand investment in clinical supervision	\$600,000 for strengthened and extended clinical supervision training for alcohol and other drug treatment and mental health workers	Rollout of training for both mental health and alcohol and other drug providers commenced in January 2017
Community Ice Action Groups	\$500,000 for grants of up to \$10,000 for communities in regional and outer metropolitan areas to develop local strategies to address ice	38 grants have thus far been provided to Community Ice Action Groups across regional Victoria to help them deliver local solutions

		and education, with further grants to be awarded in 2018-19
Training and supervision for workers	\$400,000 for the development of a standard best practice training curriculum for frontline workers	Over 11,000 people have registered for the free online ice training for frontline workers
Stage 2 – Victorian Budget 2016-17 – \$57.6 million		
Expansion of the Drug Court of Victoria	\$32 million to expand operations in Melbourne Magistrates' Court to supervise and rehabilitate offenders whose drug dependency is linked to their crime	The Melbourne Drug Court opened in March 2017 and is giving up to 170 participants each year the opportunity to address the underlying causes of their addiction
Mental health, alcohol and other drugs facilities renewal	\$10 million to improve selected mental health and alcohol and other drug facilities	29 facilities renewal grants were allocated to alcohol and other drug service providers
Alcohol and drugs residential rehabilitation service	\$6 million to develop a new residential rehabilitation facility in the Grampians region	New 20-bed residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility in Ballarat to progressively open from October 2018
Responding to ice in Aboriginal communities	\$4 million to continue and expand the Aboriginal Metropolitan Ice Partnership	Partnerships in four metropolitan areas between Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations and mainstream AOD treatment services are continuing
Further training and support to better equip frontline workers	\$5.5 million for face-to-face training for up to 9,700 health and human services workers who may have contact with people affected by ice, and a customised training package to meet the needs of vulnerable population groups, including Aboriginal people and LGBTI groups	Face to face training for frontline health and human services workers has rolled out. As of 30 April 2018, 27,478 training places have been offered to date, with 38,000 places to be made available by June 2020
Stage 3 – Victorian Budget 2017-18 – \$78.4 million		
Responding to unavoidable demand for alcohol and other drug services	\$34.8 million for: 30 new residential rehabilitation beds within existing services; Additional counselling and treatment services for up to 3,800 parents a year to meet requirements of family reunification legislation; 960 extra treatment places for people with mandatory treatment conditions	All new treatment services are now operational, providing specialist treatment support to parents and people with mandatory treatment conditions across Victoria to help them get back on their feet
Expanded treatment support for people at risk of overdose	\$12.4 million to expand support services for people transitioning in and out of treatment services, a critical time when they are at higher risk of harm	New treatment support now available across Victoria, with 10 service providers appointed to support high-risk clients through their treatment journey
Mental health and alcohol and other drug	\$10 million to improve selected mental health and alcohol and other	33 facilities renewal grants were allocated to alcohol and other drug

facilities renewal	drug facilities	service providers
Regional drug residential rehabilitation services	\$9.7 million to support land acquisition for three new residential rehabilitation facilities in the Gippsland, Hume and Barwon regions	New land parcels have been announced in Bairnsdale (Gippsland), Wangaratta (Hume) and Geelong (Barwon), with further funding in the 2018-19 Budget to commence construction
Earlier access to alcohol and other drug services	\$6 million to expand existing phone-based and online support and advice services for people using alcohol and other drugs, as well as their families and others seeking information, advice, support and referral	Funding provided to DirectLine, Family Drug Help and the Youth Drug and Alcohol Support Service to provide information, support and referral for people using alcohol and other drugs, as well as their families
Strengthening alcohol and other drug treatment data systems	\$4.1 million to upgrade the alcohol and other drug treatment data collection system, which will strengthen understanding of client pathways through alcohol and other drug treatment services	All AOD treatment services have received support to upgrade to the new Victoria Alcohol and Drug Collection, which will support a stronger understanding of client treatment journeys
Family Drug Treatment Court	\$1.4 million to extend the trial of the Family Drug Treatment Court at Broadmeadows Children's Court	Instead of going through normal court process, eligible parents can enter a 12-month program involving regular court attendance, drug treatment and testing, in order to address the underlying cause of the family breakdown

Drug Rehabilitation Plan

Initiative	Key components	Achievements
Drug Rehabilitation Plan – \$87 million		
New residential rehab beds	\$53.2 million to establish 100 additional residential rehabilitation beds for alcohol and other drug treatment by March 2018	100 new beds were online from March 2018, located across Victoria at facilities including Lower Plenty, Healesville, Maryknoll, Bendigo and St Albans
A new residential withdrawal model	\$11.7 million to establish a 28-day residential withdrawal/rehabilitation model for clients impacted by multiple life complexities	New treatment model established at Eastern Health (Turning Point), with first clients accepted in June 2018
AOD Pathways – practical help for families	\$3.3 million to deliver a new advice service through specialised staff, providing more practical support and brokerage for families seeking to locate treatment services for their loved ones	New AOD Pathways Service commenced operation from April 2018, with dedicated phone line in place to provide stronger support to people and families seeking help
Scholarships for AOD nursing	\$450,000 to strengthen the AOD nursing workforce through a program of scholarships and other training	20 new scholarships introduced for nurses currently working and seeking to work in the AOD sector

	initiatives, ensuring workers are equipped to provide the best treatment and care	to encourage lifelong learning
Trial of a medically supervised injecting room	\$8 million over two years to trial the establishment of a medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond	Trial commenced in June 2018, aiming to save lives lost to overdose and improve neighbourhood safety
Cracking down on unscrupulous providers	\$550,000 to tackle private providers who offer poor quality or unsafe drug treatment services, by supporting the Health Complaints Commissioner to strengthen monitoring and investigation	Two specialist investigators have been recruited by the Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner to focus on complaints about private treatment providers