



## Department of Justice and Community Safety

Secretary

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Our ref: EBC 21031294  
Your ref: COR 2017 6235

Coroner Jacqui Hawkins  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh Street  
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Coroner Hawkins

I refer to your findings and recommendations delivered on 24 February 2021 and received by the Department of Justice and Community Safety's (DJCS) Justice Assurance and Review Office (JARO) on 25 February 2021, regarding the death of Mr Shae Paszkiewicz at St Vincent's Hospital on 12 December 2017.

As this case proceeded as an investigation rather than inquest, DJCS did not get the opportunity to consider the proposed recommendations. As a general process, DJCS requests that it is given the opportunity to participate in any coronial matter that may result in recommendations being directed to it.

Of the four recommendations, one was directed to the Department of Health (DoH) in collaboration with DJCS (recommendation 3), and one was directed to DJCS (recommendation 4). DJCS has accepted both recommendations in principle.

This letter details steps that DJCS has already taken which are relevant to the recommendations and which will inform DJCS's implementation of the recommendations.

***Recommendation 3 - That the Victorian Department of Health collaborate with the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety to link information they hold on all people who enter Victoria's prison system, with a view to producing accurate and timely information on these people and their health outcomes including death within 10 years of release from prison. This information should be collated in consultation with the advisory group (see Recommendation Two) and should be publicly reported on (at least) an annual basis, as well as being made available to researchers who are engaged in efforts to improve these health outcomes.***

DJCS accepts recommendation 3 in principle and notes that progress towards its implementation is dependent on recommendation 2.<sup>1</sup> DJCS will consult with DoH to determine the appropriate advisory group to consider health information sharing, including any applicable requirements of the *Health Records Act 2001*.

***Recommendation 4** - That the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety should immediately introduce a take-home naloxone program (including training in overdose awareness and naloxone administration) to be made available to all people in Victorian prisons who have a history of opioid use and who are preparing to exit prison.*

DJCS accepts recommendation 4 in principle.

Naloxone is a lifesaving medicine that reverses the effects of opioid overdose. The Parliament of Victoria's *Inquiry into Drug Law Reform 2018* recommended that Naloxone be made available to prisoners with a history of opioid use upon their release from prison. The Inquiry reported that this would minimise the high risk of overdose deaths among this cohort and provide them with appropriate training and support in the broader community.

In direct response to the Inquiry's recommendations, DJCS commenced a Naloxone pilot program on 4 May 2020. The pilot was implemented at the Metropolitan Remand Centre, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, Marngoneet Correctional Centre and Loddon Prison.

Under the pilot, participating prisoners are educated on overdose prevention and response, including administration of the nasal spray, and are offered Naloxone in their medical discharge pack on release from custody.

The Penington Institute conducted a review of the pilot in June 2020. Overall, the review highlighted the value of the pilot in its aim to reduce the risk of overdose harm in the community for prisoner's post-release. This is demonstrated in the increased understanding of overdose prevention information in health, prison and Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) staff and the subsequent relaying of this information to prisoners. There was a high level of positive feedback on the pilot, despite the interruptions of COVID-19.

The Naloxone program will continue from the four pilot sites in 2021, while Ravenhall Correctional Centre commenced its Naloxone pilot program in February 2021.

As at 1 March 2021, 155 prisoners have participated in the pilot. DJCS is exploring options to expand the pilot statewide.

More broadly, the Victorian Government has committed to increasing Naloxone access to reduce the risk of harms from an opioid overdose.

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<sup>1</sup> ***Recommendation 2** - That the Victorian Department of Health convene a formal advisory group to guide the identification, prioritisation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs to reduce drug-related mortality among people who are released from prison. This advisory group should include representatives from government departments and non-government organisations whose work intersects with support of people leaving prison, as well as academic experts.*

The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment Bill 2020 was introduced in Parliament in November 2020 and is intended to commence in August 2021. If passed, the Bill will facilitate increased Naloxone access to the community, including for released prisoners. In particular, the Bill will enable regulations to be made which authorise the supply of Naloxone by additional prescribed organisations, such as needle and syringe programs.

Should you require any further information, please contact Allison Will, Director, Justice Assurance and Review Office on 0437 458 158 or by email at [jaro@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:jaro@justice.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



**Rebecca Falkingham**  
Secretary

14/05/2021