



Secretary

Department of Health

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Nancy Carbone
Senior Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria

Via email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Carbone

Court reference: COR 2017 006235

Thank you for your letter of 24 February 2021 regarding Coroner Jacqui Hawkin's finding and recommendations on the death of Shae Paszkiewicz.

The Department of Health's response to the relevant recommendations in the Coroner's report is as follows:

Recommendation One:

"That the Victorian Department of Health adopt formal responsibility for improving health outcomes and reducing drug-related mortality among people who are released from prison."

Department of Health response: Alternative to recommendation will be implemented

Health outcomes, including drug-related mortality, of people who are released from prison are jointly dependent on health service delivery within the prison system and in the community upon release. Discharge planning performs a vital role in ensuring that transition to community health services is successful.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) is responsible for health services provided in all Victorian prisons, with Justice Health established in 2007 to consolidate health policy, service planning and commissioning oversight functions for the Victorian prison system. The Department of Health is responsible for health service delivery upon release, which includes the Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) program and naloxone access in the community.

Responsibility for health outcomes and reducing drug-related mortality requires work by the Department of Health and DJCS, and therefore an alternative to the Coroner's recommendation will be implemented. The Department of Health will identify and implement key reforms in the community while working jointly with DJCS to improve health outcomes and reducing drug-related mortality for people who are released from prison.

The Department of Health is currently progressing initiatives in collaboration with DJCS to improve forensic alcohol and other drug service delivery. Current priorities include:

- targeted expansion of the alcohol and other drug behaviour change program KickStart for regional Victoria and the Aboriginal Community
- improved governance mechanisms to assess demand for alcohol and other drug services and strategies to maintain timely treatment access.

The Department of Health has also commenced work to reform Victoria's OST program to improve treatment, access and holistic care for opioid dependence, particularly for complex or vulnerable cohorts such as people exiting prison. Immediate actions include:

- policy updates for long-acting injectable buprenorphine were released in March 2021 to increase client access to this new treatment option and support a broader range of health professionals to provide this service
- mechanisms to improve OST referrals, through optimising the prescriber referral database and initial client engagement process, with the first phase of reforms to be completed in May 2021.

Further work is underway to develop longer-term reforms needed, including workforce development and improved system planning and design.

The Victorian Government has committed to increasing naloxone access to reduce the risk of harms from opioid overdose. The *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment Bill 2020* is anticipated to come into effect in August 2021 and will increase naloxone access for the most vulnerable members of our community. The Bill will enable naloxone supply from additional authorised organisations such as Needle and Syringe Programs.

The Department of Health will continue to work collaboratively with DJCS to improve continuity of care for people exiting the prison system who require alcohol and other drug supports, including OST and naloxone.

Recommendation Two:

“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...”

Department of Health response: Recommendation will be implemented

The Department of Health established an Expert Advisory Committee on potential misuse of drugs of dependence in 2018 consisting of clinical and content experts from the alcohol and other drug sector. The purpose of this group is to provide advice on the safe and effective management of all drugs of dependence for the Victorian community. OST program reform has been identified as a departmental priority in 2021 for this committee.

The Department of Health agrees with the Coroner's recommendation to convene an advisory group specific to the forensic population. The Department of Health will support DJCS to establish this group. It is proposed the advisory group consider forensic health outcomes more broadly, including a review of current forensic alcohol and other drug policies and programs.

Recommendation Three:

“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 produce accurate and timely information on these people and their health outcomes...”


Department of Health response: Recommendation will be implemented

The Department of Health accepts the need for linked data to evaluate health outcomes and guide strategic reform. The Department of Health will work with DJCS to identify mechanisms to link and utilise data in improving health outcomes for people who enter Victoria's prison system.

The Department of Health has also commenced work with the Coroner’s Prevention Unit to establish timely data sharing arrangements so that drug-related mortality information can inform policy and investment directions.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Nicole Lynch, Executive Director, Mental Health and Drugs System Policy on (03) 9096 5596 or email nicole.lynch@health.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Euan M Wallace', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Professor Euan M Wallace AM
Secretary

22/04/2021