



Department of Justice and Community Safety

Secretary

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Our ref: 21116899
Your ref: COR 2019 004949

Coroner Simon McGregor
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street,
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Dear Coroner McGregor

I refer to your findings and recommendations delivered on 29 September 2021 and received by the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) regarding [REDACTED] who died on 11 September 2019 in the community following his release from prison.

I extend my deepest condolences to [REDACTED] family and those affected by his passing.

Recommendations One and Two are directed to DJCS, as outlined below. DJCS accepts both recommendations.

Recommendation One:

That the Victorian Department of Health and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety work together to 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. This advisory group should have the necessary capacity and authority to address health information sharing, including any applicable requirements of the Health Records Act 2001.

DJCS accepts Recommendation One. Officers of DJCS and the Department of Health have liaised in relation to your findings. This recommendation was in its initial stages of implementation prior to receipt of your findings, in response to inquest findings made by Coroner Hawkins following the death of Mr Shae Paszkiewicz.

These actions were disrupted during 2020 and 2021 due to the impact of COVID-19. I can advise that work has recommenced to develop shared governance, advisory, and information sharing mechanisms regarding forensic clients, with a view to repurpose existing governance arrangements to meet the objectives of the recommendation.

Recommendation Two:

That the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety should expand its pilot naloxone program statewide to all Victorian prisoners.

DJCS accepts Recommendation Two and had commenced implementation of this intervention prior to receipt of the Coroner's findings.

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.

In direct response to the Inquiry's recommendations, DJCS commenced a 'Naloxone on Release' 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. During 2021, the program was embedded and expanded to all public prisons and one private prison (Ravenhall Correctional Centre).

DJCS's 'Naloxone on Release' program supports prisoners by prescribing take home Naloxone on their release from custody. The program includes training in overdose awareness and Naloxone administration via a 'train the trainer' model, designed to enable alcohol and other drugs (AOD), mental health and primary care staff to deliver overdose prevention education to prisoners. The program provides prisoners with information about overdose following release and on how to administer Naloxone to respond to a person overdosing.

The expansion of the 'Naloxone on Release' program was informed by an independent review, which confirmed the value of the program in pre-release training of prisoners to prevent, recognise and respond to opioid overdose, and in supporting the safe provision of Naloxone to prisoners on their release. As at 9 December 2021, 472 units of Naloxone have been allocated to prisoners upon their release from prison.

DJCS has received funding to engage a project officer to further support the rollout of the program to the private prisons, to identify opportunities to increase the prescription of Naloxone to prisoners prior to their release, and to monitor and contribute to the evaluation of the program. Additionally, Penington Institute has been contracted to undertake a rapid review of the program to further inform program improvements.

Further relevant initiatives in prisons include a well-established Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) Program for people exiting prison. Prisoners are referred by the prison health service to a community pharmacy and General Practitioner to support them to maintain their OST on release, which is subsidised by the Victorian Government for up to 30 days. This is a critical component of release planning to ensure prisoners have post release support, to reduce risky behaviours and fatal overdose.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Carly Edwards, Associate Deputy Secretary, Policy, Strategy and Offender Outcomes on 0429 324 742 or Carly.Edwards@justice.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Rebecca Falkingham
Secretary

21/12/2021