



Secretary

Department of Health

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.health.vic.gov.au
DX 210081

BAC-CO-26980
COR 2020 003434

Coroner Sarah Gebert
Coroners Court of Victoria
Via e-mail: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au.

Dear Coroner Gebert

Thank you for providing your findings in relation to the death of [REDACTED] in June 2020. My thoughts are with [REDACTED] family and loved ones. I note that there were several of [REDACTED] friends present and I hope they are also receiving care and support after this tragic event.

I note that you recommend both a drug checking service and the implementation of an early warning network in Victoria.

The Department of Health (department) is continuing to work with our partners on improving surveillance and system intelligence, primarily through the ongoing pilot of the Emerging Drug Network of Australia – Victoria (EDNAV). You note that there is no reason to believe that recent fatal harms associated with NPS benzodiazepine use in Victoria are transitory, and through EDNAV I have also been informed of the non-fatal harms arising from the use of substances. The surveillance work occurring through EDNAV is crucial in understanding emerging harms and will inform and support further work by the department in understanding demographics, context and reasons for the use of these substances, to better inform our prevention, early intervention, treatment and harm reduction measures.

As I have written in a recent similar case, the department acknowledges that drug checking services, where implemented, can provide another source of information to support decision-making but note there are no current plans to implement a drug checking service of the kind you have recommended in your findings. The department will continue to consider evidence for additional harm reduction approaches that will prevent further deaths and support improved health and social outcomes for people who use drugs.

In your findings you also note that those with [REDACTED] did not recognise and respond to the signs of overdose. The department is continuing to work with both the peak bodies of the alcohol and other drugs treatment sector as well as peer organisations such as Harm Reduction Victoria and the Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) so that information about overdose is disseminated throughout the community. I believe our work in this area is a crucial part of our suite of harm reduction responses.

Should your team wish to discuss this matter further, they can contact Krista Vanderheide, Director, Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy and Policy at the Department of Health via krista.vanderheide@health.vic.gov.au.

I thank you and the Court for this recommendation and trust this information is of assistance. Your findings and recommendations will continue to be considered by the department as further work is progressed to enhance harm reduction and surveillance initiatives.

Yours sincerely

Jacinda de Witts

Jacinda de Witts
Acting Secretary

11/07/2022