



## 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](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)  
DX 210081

BAC CO 29628

Colleen Bebbington  
Senior Coroner's Registrar  
Coroners Support Services  
Coroners Court of Victoria

[cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](mailto:cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

COR 2017 003163

Dear Ms Bebbington

Thank you for your letter of 29 July 2022 regarding Coroner Sarah Gebert's investigation and findings into the death of Master S, who passed away on 3 July 2017. I acknowledge the tragic loss of life described in the Coroner's findings and the impact of Master S's death on his loved ones, community and kin.

I note the Coroner's finding that Master S's death was likely caused by the unintended consequence of deliberate inhalation of deodorant, and her recommendations regarding opportunities for prevention of harms associated with volatile substance misuse.

I recognise there has been little work regarding volatile substance misuse in recent years. It is timely for the Department of Health to review its understanding of volatile substance misuse, including how it has evolved as a public health issue and evidence-based strategies to reduce associated harms (recommendation 2).

I note the Coroner's suggestion that the review would ideally involve engagement with product manufacturers of volatile substances. As supply reduction strategies such as product re-design requires national advocacy, the department will raise this matter with the Commonwealth Department of Health.

In relation to recommendation 1, the Coroner asked that the department review, update and relaunch the booklet *About Inhalant Abuse: For Health and Community Workers*. I appreciate that this resource was developed many years ago and acknowledge the context in which volatile substance misuse occurs may have changed. The review outlined in recommendation 2 will assist the department to identify the most contemporary and accessible information for those who work with and support people at risk of volatile substance misuse, including any updates required to this resource.

While review outcomes are pending, the department will work with the Alcohol and Drug Foundation to update the resource 'Inhalants'. I note that there are opportunities to improve this resource by including information important for identifying and addressing volatile substance misuse including common household products, such as Rexona deodorant, and the risk of underlying and/or genetic heart issues as noted in the Coroner's investigation. This approach will

help the Victorian community to have access to contemporary and evidence-based information about the risks associated with volatile substance misuse.

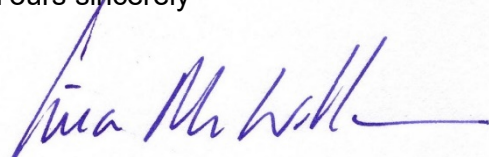
I note the relevance of these recommendations with Coroner English's findings into the death of Yunjie Zhang, who passed away in a setting of presumed nitrous oxide use between 28 July and 7 August 2020 (COR 2020 004299). As another volatile substance, I am hopeful that the department's review will ensure that those who work with people at risk of volatile substance misuse, broader than the inhalant identified in the death of Master S, will have access to the best available information to reduce associated harms.

The department will work on addressing these recommendations over the next 18 months in consultation with key stakeholders and experts and will report to the Coroners Court by August 2023 with an update on its progress.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Ms Krista Vanderheide, Director, Mental Health and AOD Strategy and Policy, in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division on 0439 471 165 or via email: [krista.vanderheide@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:krista.vanderheide@health.vic.gov.au).

I thank Coroner Gerbert for the extensive investigation and presentation of findings to address volatile substance misuse in Victoria. I would also like to again express my condolences to Master S's family, community and kin who have been affected by this tragic loss of life.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Euan M Wallace', written over a light blue grid background.

**Professor Euan M Wallace AM**

Secretary

24/10/2022