



The Hon Emma McBride MP
Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health

Ref No: MC24-013087

His Honour Judge Cain
State Coroner
State Coronial Services Centre
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Judge Cain

I am writing in relation to findings from the Coroners Court of Victoria following the tragic deaths of six individuals:

'AS' (COR 2021 002415)
Heather Pierard (COR 2021 002457)
Laurence Cox (COR 2023 005415)
Matt Byrne (COR 2021 001636)
Nathan Greenwood (COR 2021 004938)
Ryley Cox (COR 2023 005416)

I convey my sincere condolences to each of the families for their loss. I know that AS, Heather, Laurence, Matt, Nathan and Ryley were loved and that their loss is deeply felt.

I recognise the devastating impact associated with self-harm for individuals, their families and the entire community. The Australian Government is continuing to work to address the causes and means of self-harm, including legislative changes and public health campaigns, as part of our focus on mental health and suicide prevention.

The Australian Government is working to make sure that everyone is safe online. The Federal Parliament previously passed the *Criminal Code Amendment (Suicide Related Material Offences) Act 2005*, which makes it illegal under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* to use communications media such as the internet to discuss the practical aspects of suicide. In the past year, the Australian Government has brought forward the review of the *Online Safety Act 2021* and is now carefully considering the report so that online safety laws are effective and that the community is protected from online harms.

I will directly raise the findings of the Coroners Court of Victoria at the next Online Harms Ministers Meeting, which has been established to examine online harms and better coordinate action to address harms across the Australian Government. I have also met with the eSafety Commissioner to discuss the findings and what other steps may be taken to prevent the online promotion of sodium nitrite as a means of suicide. I strongly encourage every member of the community to report harmful online content relating to suicide to the eSafety Commissioner.

In response to the increasing misuse of sodium nitrite the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has classified most preparations containing greater than 15% sodium nitrite as 'Dangerous Poison' (Schedule 7). This more restrictive scheduling, which came into effect on 1 June 2022, was particularly made in response to the misuse of sodium nitrite for self-harm, and promotion of the substance (particularly online) as a means of suicide.

The current scheduling of sodium nitrite means that products containing more than 15% sodium nitrite should not be sold to the public. I support your recommendation to the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Health to include sodium nitrite in the Victorian Poisons Code, which would restrict the general sale of the product through retailers.

It is my hope that this work to address online harms and the more restrictive scheduling of sodium nitrite will prevent the same experiences and loss in the future.

I again want to convey my heartfelt sympathy to every one of the individuals, families, friends, and community members for their significant loss.

Yours sincerely



Emma McBride MP
Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health

29 November 2024

cc: The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care
The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications