



Secretary

Department of Health

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Nicole D'Rozario
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Via e-mail: team14@courts.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms D'Rozario

Thank you for providing the findings of Coroner David Ryan dated 17 April 2025 into the deaths of Carly Morse, Thomas Vale, Michael Hodgkinson and Abdul El Sayed, who died on 24 June 2025. I offer my condolences to their families and loved ones.

Coroner Ryan directed the following recommendation towards the Department of Health (the department):

The Department of Health consider the effectiveness of nitazene test strips and whether they can be made available to the community as a measure to reduce unintentional overdose.

The department is committed to reducing drug-related harms in Victoria, including unintentional overdoses, through a variety of harm reduction initiatives. The department is supportive of Coroner Ryan's recommendation, and will continue to consider the effectiveness of nitazene testing strips as this technology develops. This response also outlines other drug checking services available in Victoria and new initiatives being developed to reduce drug related harm, including overdoses.

Are nitazene test strips effective at reducing unintentional overdoses?

The scientific evidence base for nitazene test strips is still developing. Emerging evidence shows that nitazene test strips may have similar technology shortfalls as fentanyl test strips that may limit their effectiveness at reducing harm, including:

- testing strips require a relatively large sample of the drug (5-10mgs) to yield an accurate result. This means that samples that are not accurately diluted may register as negative, potentially giving users a false sense of safety.¹
- testing strips cannot detect all analogues in the nitazene family, or the presence of other non-nitazene drugs. This can lead to false negative results.²

¹ [Black, Chrissy; Johnson, Olivia; Clark, Lisa \(2024\). Drug Checking Technical Report - Nitazene Test Strips \(Part 2 - Opioids\). Institute of Environmental Science and Research.](#)

² [Nitazene test strips: a laboratory evaluation. De Vrieze LM, Stove CP, Vandeputte MM. Harm Reduct J. 2024](#)

- Testing strips have also been shown to provide inaccurate false positive results on occasion.³

The department will continue to investigate the efficacy of nitazene strips and monitor the scientific research and developments to improve their effectiveness.

Other drug related harm reduction initiatives in place in Victoria

The department wishes to draw the court's attention to the various initiatives in place to reduce drug harms and overdoses:

- The Victorian Government has invested \$4 million in an 18-month pill testing trial, inclusive of both mobile and fixed-site services. The mobile service began in December 2024 and has operated at five events to date, with five more planned for the 2025–26 summer festival season. From August 2025, a free, confidential and anonymous fixed-site service, known as the Victorian Pill Testing Service, will open at 95 Brunswick Street in Fitzroy, offering year-round access to drug checking and harm reduction advice. The Victorian Pill Testing Service will be open to all people who use drugs and can test the make-up of most pills, capsules, powders, crystals, steroids or liquids. The trial is being formally evaluated to assess the suitability of the service model for long-term implementation. Reports from the five completed mobile events are already publicly available and include detailed information on service usage, types of substances tested and detection of unexpected psychoactive ingredients.
- Blood toxicology and drug residue analysis drug monitoring programs that generate intelligence that inform the department's drug alerts and advisories capacity.
- Victoria's Take-Home Naloxone Program provides free access to naloxone and has supplied over 15,000 units of naloxone since 2023. Naloxone is a safe and easy to use medication that temporarily reverses the effects of an opioid overdose and reduces harm. Anyone can obtain naloxone from participating needle and syringe programs, medically supervised injecting rooms, and participating community pharmacies across Victoria.

³ [Characteristics of take-home fentanyl test strip use and support for drug checking services among people who use heroin in Australia: learnings for an increasingly complex drug market | Harm Reduction Journal | Full Text](#)

The Victorian government is also delivering a range of other initiatives to reduce drug-related harm and improve health outcomes for people who use drugs as part of a Statewide Action Plan. Key initiatives include:

- The roll-out of 20 naloxone dispensing machines (10 in metropolitan Melbourne and 10 in regional areas) in 2025-26.
- The launch of a new overdose prevention and response helpline, which will be staffed by peer workers and offer anonymous care and support to callers, in 2025-26.
- Expanded assertive outreach services, including cohealth's City Street Health program and new mobile outreach services in Footscray and St Kilda. These services will provide sterile injecting equipment, overdose prevention, harm reduction advice, wound care, and referrals to primary health, housing, mental health and legal support.
- A Community Health Pharmacotherapy Grants program which will expand access to pharmacotherapy in up to 30 locations across Victoria.

I trust this information is of assistance to the court.

Yours sincerely



Jenny Atta PSM

Secretary

13/07/2025