

25 November 2025

Lord Mayor and Councillors
City of Melbourne

Re Agenda item 7.3: Support for Medically Supervised Overdose Prevention Services

Dear Lord Mayor and Councillors,

The Monash Addiction Research Centre (MARC) appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission regarding the evidence for medically supervised overdose prevention services. As a leading national research centre dedicated to reducing alcohol and other drug-related harm, MARC is committed to ensuring that policy decisions are informed by rigorous evidence, public health expertise, and the lived experiences of people who use drugs.

Overdose death remains a major and preventable cause of mortality in Australia. Since 2000, more than 44,000 Australians have lost their lives to overdose, a tragic and growing public health emergency.¹ Medically supervised overdose prevention services (also referred to as supervised injecting facilities) represent one of the most effective strategies available to prevent these deaths. Importantly, these services do not supply drugs; they instead provide a safe, medically supported environment for people who may otherwise use drugs in unsafe settings where fatal overdose risk is significantly higher.

Overdose prevention centres have operated globally for nearly four decades. The first service opened in Switzerland in 1986, and today more than 100 centres operate across Europe and North America.² Australia has two long-standing examples: the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre, operating since 2001; and Victoria's Lennox Street service in Richmond, established as a trial in June 2018, extended in 2020, and made permanent in 2023.

These services are among the most extensively evaluated harm-reduction interventions worldwide, and the findings are unequivocal: they save lives, improve local amenity, and facilitate access to healthcare for people who are otherwise disengaged from services.

Independent evaluations of Victoria's Lennox Street service demonstrate its profound and measurable impact. Since opening in 2018:

- Over 11,000 overdoses have been safely managed;³
- There have been more than 177,000 instances of wraparound health and social services being accessed onsite;⁴ and
- The service is estimated to have saved at least 63 lives, with zero deaths.⁵

These outcomes translate directly into reduced pressure on emergency departments and ambulance services, and most importantly, into families and communities spared the devastation of preventable loss.

¹ Penington Institute, *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2025* (Report, 2025) xiii <<https://www.penington.org.au/australias-annual-overdose-report-2025/>>.

² Leo Beletsky et al, 'The Global Health and Equity Imperative For Safe Consumption Facilities' (2018) 392(10147) *The Lancet* 553, 553 <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31469-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31469-7)>.

³ 'Medically Supervised Injecting Room', *North Richmond Community Health* (Web Page) <<https://nrch.com.au/services/medically-supervised-injecting-room-msir/>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Ryan, *Review of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room: Key Findings and Recommendations* (Final Report, 21 February 2023) 12 <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/review-of-the-medically-supervised-injecting-room-2023>>.

Medically supervised overdose prevention services also enhance public amenity. Sydney's MSIC reported a 49% decrease in public drug injection and discarded needles between 2001 and 2007.⁶ The Ryan Review found similar reductions in Richmond, alongside fewer ambulance callouts and hospital admissions for overdose.⁷ This reduction of public drug use and discarded injecting equipment is critical for local business. Witnessing even a single overdose death in a laneway or on the street can have devastating and lasting impacts on local residents and staff working in nearby businesses.

Beyond saving lives, overdose prevention centres serve as critical points of engagement for people who are often marginalised from the healthcare system.⁸

- Between July 2018 and June 2022, the Richmond service delivered over 22,500 health promotion activities, more than 950 blood-borne virus / STI testing and treatment services, and nearly 3,000 instances of BBV education, screening, vaccination, and follow-up.
- Most service users report no needle sharing, significantly reducing the risk of HIV and hepatitis transmission.
- In its first 18 months, the service made 12,426 referrals to alcohol and other drug treatment, mental health care, primary care, oral health, housing and homelessness services, and legal supports. High quality evidence shows that referral to evidence-based drug treatment can lead to reduction or complete cessation of drug use which has enormous health and social benefits for individuals and communities. Many people who have entered treatment via medically supervised overdose prevention services attest to the powerful effect that building trust in these services was the step that helped them enter treatment and change their lives.

Support for medically supervised overdose prevention services is widespread among peak professional bodies, including the Royal Australasian College of Physicians,⁹ the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners,¹⁰ the Australian Medical Association Victoria, the Victorian Ambulance Union, Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australasia, and the Public Health Association of Australia.¹¹

MARC urges the City of Melbourne to consider the strong evidence supporting these services: medically supervised overdose prevention services save lives, improve community safety and amenity, and strengthen pathways into treatment and support. They represent a vital component of a modern, humane, and evidence-based public health response to overdose, and have connected thousands of Victorians to life-changing healthcare.

Yours sincerely,



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⁶ Allison Salmon, John Kaldor and Lisa Maher, *Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre: Evaluation of Service Operation and Overdose-Related Events* (Evaluation Report, No 4, June 2007) 7-8 <<https://www.kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf>>.

⁷ John Ryan, *Review of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room: Key Findings and Recommendations* (Final Report, 21 February 2023) 6, 15 <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/review-of-the-medically-supervised-injecting-room-2023>>.

⁸ Ryan (n 5) 7, 13, 18.

⁹ Royal Australasian College of Physicians, *Medically Supervised Injecting Centre* (Position Statement, 2012) <<https://www.racgp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/medically-supervised-injecting-centre-position-statement.pdf>>.

¹⁰ Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 'RACGP Welcomes Medically Supervised Injecting Room Announcement' (Media Release, 8 March 2023) <<https://www.racgp.org.au/gp-news/media-releases/2023-media-releases/march-2023/racgp-welcomes-medically-supervised-injecting-room>>.

¹¹ Jill Tomlinson et al, '#EndOverdoseMelbourne' (Open Letter, 22 February 2024) <<https://www.endoverdosemelbourne.com/>>.