

MEDIA RELEASE – APRIL 26, 2024

Scrapping plans for second medically supervised injection room at odds with expert advice: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government’s decision to abandon plans for a second medically supervised injecting room in Melbourne is deeply disappointing, and at odds with evidence and expert advice about the best way to support people living with addictions to get help, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We are concerned by the Victorian Government’s announcement that it will walk away from a planned second medically supervised injecting room, despite all of the evidence around the first injecting room in North Richmond having saved lives and improved community safety,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“By establishing a medically supervised injecting room in the first place, the Victorian Government made a commitment to health-based responses, not punitive responses, to address serious societal problems like drug addiction.

“Backflipping on plans to expand this service, despite being recommended by former Victoria Police commissioner Ken Lay in a report he was commissioned to produce by the Victorian Government, sets a worrying precedent that our political leaders are more focused on what is popular rather than what is right,” says Ms Edwards.

A second review of the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond, produced by an independent panel, was delivered in February 2023.

It found that in its first five years of operation, the facility had saved up to 63 lives and safely managed almost 6,000 overdose events. At the same time, a downward trend in the number of heroin-involved fatal overdoses in the City of Yarra was recorded.

The review also found that many of the more than 6,100 registered clients of the facility experienced multiple and complex forms of disadvantage such as unemployment, chronic health issues and housing insecurity.

“We see through our own work at Jesuit Social Services that many people experiencing addiction problems are often experiencing other complex problems such as mental illness and homelessness. These are some of the most vulnerable members of our community and need support to address their challenges and keep themselves and the broader community safe,” says Ms Edwards.

“While we welcome the Victorian Government’s commitment to other recommendations from the Lay Report, including the appointment of Victoria’s first Chief Addiction Adviser to develop a statewide strategy to reduce drug-related harms over the long-term, this is a deeply disappointing missed opportunity to expand a service that is already working to save lives and reduce harm.”

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