

MEDIA RELEASE

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INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY: CALLS FOR GREATER FOCUS ON PREVENTION & HARM REDUCTION

The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) is calling for a greater focus on key prevention and harm reduction initiatives on International Overdose Awareness Day today. In particular, AIVL is calling for the implementation of widespread peer distribution of the overdose reversal drug naloxone and support for supervised injecting facilities.

“The new National Drug Strategy refers specifically to ‘medically supervised injection centres and drug consumption rooms’ and the need to prevent and respond to overdose ‘including increased access to naloxone’ as ‘examples of evidence-based and practice-informed approaches’¹. With the new National Drug Strategy in place, it’s vitally important that governments around the country ensure that the agreed priorities are implemented. On International Overdose Awareness Day, the focus is on those initiatives that prevent overdoses and save lives,” said Melanie Walker, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of AIVL.

“Each year more than 1,700 Australians lose their lives as a result of an accidental drug overdose², a figure exceeding Australia’s national road toll³. International Overdose Awareness Day is a global event held on the 31st of August each year, aiming to raise awareness of overdose and reduce the stigma of drug-related deaths. It acknowledges the grief felt by families and friends remembering those who have died or were permanently injured as a result of drug overdose. As part of International Overdose Awareness Day, AIVL’s member organisations around the country will be undertaking activities to promote awareness and prevention and remember those lost.

“A key message is that the tragedy of overdose deaths is preventable. In this context, it’s important to focus on practical things that can be done right now in Australia to save lives. If the initiatives outlined in the new National Drug Strategy are to be implemented, federal, state and territory governments all have an important role to play.

“With the development of new national strategies to address blood-borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections also underway, AIVL is advocating for a renewed focus on prevention and harm reduction, particularly in relation to engagement with priority populations. People who use drugs are a priority population for all of these national strategies and have an important role to play as part of broader prevention and harm reduction efforts. Enabling greater access to naloxone and providing safe injecting facilities for people who use drugs are practical ways that governments can help people to protect themselves and prevent overdose deaths - which would be a wonderful outcome for individuals, families and the broader Australian community.

“It would be great to see enhanced investment in cost effective prevention and harm reduction measures such as those outlined in the new National Drug Strategy, rather than those that have been proven ineffective, such as drug testing of welfare recipients, for example. The evidence shows us what works. Now we just need governments willing to change counterproductive laws and allocate resources accordingly,” said Ms Walker.

AIVL is the national organisation representing people who use/have used illicit drugs and is the peak body for the state and territory peer-based drug user organisations.

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¹ National Drug Strategy 2017-2026: [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/55E4796388E9EDE5CA25808F00035035/\\$File/National-Drug-Strategy-2017-2026.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/55E4796388E9EDE5CA25808F00035035/$File/National-Drug-Strategy-2017-2026.pdf)

² Penington Institute: <http://www.penington.org.au/australias-annual-overdose-report-2018/>

³ Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: <https://bitre.gov.au/statistics/safety/>