



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## VICTORIAN SAFE INJECTING FACILITY ANNOUNCEMENT AHEAD OF INTERNATIONAL DRUG USERS DAY

The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) has welcomed the Victorian Government's decision to trial a medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond, which has come on the eve of International Drug Users Day. AIVL has long been advocating for a greater focus on key prevention and harm reduction initiatives, including the urgent establishment of a safe injecting facility in Melbourne and the implementation of widespread peer distribution of the overdose reversal drug naloxone.

"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'<sup>1</sup>. 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 the eve of International Drug Users Day on 1 November, the Victorian Government's announcement of a package of initiatives<sup>2</sup> designed to respond to the needs of drug users, their families and the broader community is particularly significant," said Melanie Walker, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of AIVL.

"Each year more than 1,400 Australians lose their lives as a result of a drug overdose<sup>3</sup>, a figure comparable with Australia's national road toll<sup>4</sup>. 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 and the Victorian Government has demonstrated its strong leadership in this area today.

"With the development of new national strategies to address blood-borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections now also underway, AIVL is advocating for a renewed focus on prevention and harm reduction initiatives at the national level, 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. Providing safe injecting facilities and enabling greater access to naloxone 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.

"On International Drug Users Day 2017, AIVL and its member organisations around the country will be recognising and celebrating the strength and diversity of our communities and the progress we've made in improving our health and human rights. Drug user organisations challenge stigma and promote the voice of people who use drugs in all aspects of policy and service delivery. AIVL and its member organisations are calling for the adoption of a true partnership approach nationally and in each jurisdiction to resolve the systemic issues and disadvantage facing people who use drugs. With the announcement of a safe injecting facility by the Victorian Government, we know that we are being heard. It would be great to see enhanced investment in cost effective prevention and harm reduction measures in all the states and territories of Australia. The evidence shows us what works. Now we just need governments around the country 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. **The full statement from AIVL and its member organisations for International Drug Users Day is available at:** <http://www.aivl.org.au/resource/joint-statement-for-international-drug-users-day-2017/>.*

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<sup>1</sup> 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)

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Government: <https://www.vic.gov.au/drugrehabplan/saving-lives.html>

<sup>3</sup> Penington Institute: <http://www.penington.org.au/australias-annual-overdose-report-2017/>

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: <https://bitre.gov.au/statistics/safety/>