

## **Victorian Government response to the Review of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR) 2023**

In February 2023 an independent panel, chaired by Mr John Ryan, delivered the second review *Review of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room 2023* (the Ryan Review). Mr Ryan, along with members Ms Chris Kotur and the Hon. Robert Knowles outlined 10 recommendations to the Minister for Mental Health.

The Government welcomed the findings and thanks Mr Ryan and the independent panel for their considered and detailed work.

The Ryan Review found that since its establishment in 2018, the MSIR trial in North Richmond has succeeded in achieving the trial's central objective, with almost 6,000 overdose events safely managed in the MSIR trial, and up to 63 lives have been saved.

The 10 recommendations, included continuing the successful MSIR as an ongoing service, expanding support for clients, and addressing safety and amenity concerns in the surrounding community through stronger collaboration between agencies.

### **Progress against immediate priorities**

The positive outcomes from the trial provide a clear justification for the continuation of the services offered by the North Richmond MSIR in an ongoing capacity. Accordingly, the Victorian Government took immediate action to make the MSIR an ongoing service. On 16 May 2023, The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023 received Royal Assent. This legislation established the North Richmond MSIR as an ongoing service. The Government also undertook immediate measures to be taken to further boost safety and amenity in the North Richmond precinct and increase wrap-around supports for MSIR clients.

The Ryan Review noted North Richmond Community Health's undoubted success in reducing overdoses and drug-related harm over the period of the trial. However, it was recommended a re-commissioning process occur to ensure that the MSIR provider has the structure, resources, and expertise to support the proposed enhanced model of care. A recommissioning process was undertaken, via an invited call for submissions issued in August 2023, to identify a service provider / consortium to deliver an enhanced model of care at the North Richmond MSIR from July 2024. The successful provider consortium is comprised of North Richmond Community Health, St Vincent's Hospital, Your Community Health and Access Health. In keeping with the Ryan review recommendation, the recommissioned MSIR will provide an enhanced model of care facilitated by a workforce with expertise in complex care coordination.

To help reduce the incidence of public injecting and overdose while responding to needs of the local community and businesses North Richmond Community Health have been supported to deliver an expanded assertive outreach service in North Richmond. This enhanced service commenced in September 2023, operates after-hours and on weekends and employs a multidisciplinary workforce.

### **Implementation of the review recommendations**

With the immediate priorities now in progress, the Victorian Government is committed to acting on the recommendations to reduce overdose harm, improve client health outcomes and improve neighbourhood amenity. Delivering these goals will require sustained and ongoing participation from a wide range of stakeholders including, but not limited to, the Department of Health, Homes Victoria as part of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of Transport, Department of Education, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, Yarra Council, local community groups, business owners and local residents.

### ***Working together***

The North Richmond Precinct Revitalisation Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) has been established. The IDC will focus on providing strategic advice to the Victorian Government on critical issues and broader renewal challenges and opportunities in the North Richmond area. The IDC will provide whole of government leadership to drive the overall revitalisation of the precinct and will oversee a strategic and multi-agency response to improve the safety and amenity in North Richmond. The IDC Terms of Reference will be made publicly available.

The existing North Richmond Precinct Community Committee (NRPCC) and its Reference Groups, comprising around 70 stakeholders including public housing and private housing residents, state and local government representatives and community sector organisations, will be able to elevate issues to the IDC for further government consideration.

In addition, Homes Victoria and the Department of Families Fairness and Housing will collectively build on existing work to improve coordination between security providers to ensure there is an integrated and proactive approach to security across the North Richmond precinct.

### ***Supporting the community and MSIR clients***

To support the work of the enhanced outreach service in addressing the ongoing issue of inappropriately discarded injecting equipment, the Department of Health will work with the Department of Government Services (DGS) and the City of Yarra to improve the identification of drug litter hotspots and community reporting.

Work is also underway by Victoria Police, through the implementation of the neighbourhood policing initiative, to increase local policing efforts in the North Richmond precinct, including in the vicinity of the MSIR.

In recognition of the important role of opioid pharmacotherapy in the treatment of addiction, the 2023-24 State Budget invested an additional \$10 million in the Victorian pharmacotherapy system.

### ***Leadership beyond the MSIR***

The Ryan Review found that addressing drug harms in Richmond requires a corresponding uplift in AOD system leadership and capability across the state. Accordingly, the role of Chief Addiction Advisor and an AOD Ministerial Advisory Council will be established within the Department of Health to provide AOD specialist leadership, guide system-level reforms. They will also provide expert advice on AOD priorities to the Minister for Mental Health and the Secretary of the Department of Health.

### ***Access to pharmacotherapy***

The Ryan Review identified that Victoria's pharmacotherapy system is unable to meet the needs of the community, as people struggle to access the drug treatment medication that would help them cease or reduce their drug use. To maintain and strengthen access to opioid pharmacotherapy in the Victorian Government will work to enhance community health service prescribing, address prescriber shortages.

Recognising that short-term measures have been unable to address the complex issues impacting access to treatment, dedicated resources have been allocated to a review of Victoria's opioid pharmacotherapy treatment program. A new program will deliver increased access to opioid pharmacotherapy in community health services, addressing prescriber shortages and delivering on reforms to ensure sustained access to opioid pharmacotherapy in Victoria.

Alongside a recommended increase in the availability of pharmacotherapy and diversifying pharmacotherapy treatment options, a hydromorphone trial will be established as a Victorian-first initiative. A clinical trial of hydromorphone will be conducted to assess its role as a pharmacotherapy option, particularly for those where previous treatments have been ineffective.

### ***Measuring success***

Co-chaired by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health, the IDC will hold responsibility for monitoring and reporting on progress made against the Ryan review recommendations and reporting to government.

A further review of the North Richmond MSIR service was included as part of the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023*, which requires a review to be completed before 1 January 2028.

**Other recommendations**

As announced in March 2023, the Victorian Government will not be accepting the recommendation to expand or review current eligibility criteria for the service.