



Harm Reduction Victoria 2023 AGM Minutes

Date/time of meeting	Wednesday 6 December 2023, 4-5:30PM	
Location of meeting	Meeting held Hybrid, Teams & In-person at HRVic Office (299-305 Victoria Street, Brunswick VIC 3056)	
Attendees	<p>Board Rob Dwyer, President Penny Hill, Vice President Peter Higgs, Treasurer Katia Lallo, Secretariat Craig Harvey Gaby Bruning</p> <p>Staff Sione Crawford - Member Jess Holcombe - Member Brit Chapman - Member Samantha Jones - Member Nadia Gavin - Member Frank Bees - Member Nick Kent - Member Caro Weidner - Member Matthew Plumb - Member Amelia Berg Jimmy Harrington</p>	<p>Attendees Chris Christoforou Ele Morrison Chris Gough Dee Monica Barrat - Member Candice G - Member Peter Wern Elizabeth Birbilis (DH) Paul Dietze Joel Murray Julia Daly Ash Blackwell – Member Sally Watkinson - Member</p>

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	Daniel Ward Sarah Lord Caro Weidner Mark Belzer Jane Dicka Christian Vega Amanda Callus Bee Hayes - Member	
Guests	Chris Gough, CAHMA Executive Director	
Apologies		
Time meeting commenced	4PM	

Agenda item/topic	Discussion/Motion	Moved	Seconded	Outcome
1. Welcome & Acknowledgement	<p>Robyn Dwyer, Board President and AGM chair welcomes everybody to the HRVic 2023 Annual General Meeting. Introduces herself as a member of the HRVic Board & President for the last 7 years.</p> <p>Acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the Wurundjeri lands on which she was hosting the meeting and all the lands on which AGM participants were meeting. Acknowledges that sovereignty has never been ceded nor extinguished. She paid her respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging and extended this respect to all First Nations peoples joining us today.</p>			
2. Declaration of Conflicts of interest	None			
3. Minutes of 2022 AGM	To accept the minutes from the previous AGM, held on February 8, 2023, as a true and accurate recording of the meeting.	Sam Jones	Peter Higgs	All in favour. Rob Dwyer declared the motion carried.

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<p>4. President's Report</p>				
<p>5. CEO Report</p>	<p>Sione Crawford spoke to this</p> <p>One of the issues I have when writing these reports is that there is no way, in this short piece, to do justice to all of the work and all of the team members and volunteers that do that work for and with our community across the year. To get a wider sense of our work I urge you to check out the different program reports across the pages of this, our Annual Report for 2022 – 2023.</p> <p>On August 31 last year we, along with our friends at Access Health, St. Kilda, undertook a public event at the Victorian Parliament Steps, rallying for a range of changes to public policy that we believe would lower overdose rates and lead to better lives for people who use drugs, as well as to remember those who have not survived the drug war. The steps looked amazing with so many of our crew and community showing up to support us, from politicians to service providers and of course people who use drugs.</p> <p>Harm reduction is not just a service provision modality but a philosophy of love, care and empowerment, but too often stigma, discrimination and poor policy combine to make the work of harm reduction more challenging than it has to be.</p> <p>In April, we co-hosted the 27th Harm Reduction International Conference. Those involved know that a universe of experiences are contained in that sentence. This was a big deal for us and to be the local partner was an amazing opportunity to show the capacity of Victoria's community of people who use drugs and harm reductionists.</p> <p>In summary, it was a fantastic experience and opportunity and one that stretched us and also showed us how innovative and resourceful we are. Everyone at HRVic made this happen but I have to call out Nick Kent and Ben Yonson for taking on a coordinating role that we may not have expected at the start of this journey – including when I went into hospital for surgery unexpectedly – and Samantha Jones who envisaged and designed and largely produced what Pat O'Hare – HRI's founder – called the best conference stall he had ever seen.</p> <p>The Harm Reduction International conference followed hot on the heels of our move into a new premises in Brunswick. We have space now to undertake community events, forums and large meetings that were impossible at Peel St HQ. Jess Holcombe should take a bow for</p>			

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	<p>wrangling us into this new building. There was a lot of heartache in the process – continually held up by things outside our control – but we are set up for a number of years now. A fantastic benefit of having a bit more space is that we can co-locate with allies. In particular we are proud to share the building with Vixen, Victoria’s peer organisation of sex workers. Sex workers and people who inject drugs have long had shared communities and worked together strategically to prevent HIV in our communities and to break down stigma.</p> <p>Stigmatising health promotion campaigns aimed at people who use and inject drugs are too common, so it has been fantastic to partner with EC Australia to roll out the Victorian arm of the It’s Your Right: Live Free of Hep C campaign that challenges this. Empowering messages that spoke to our communities were co-developed and designed to remind people who use drugs that we all deserve hepatitis C testing and treatment if we need it – that it is our right.</p> <p>Messages like “get clear while on gear” and “clear it again and again” aimed to remind people they could treat hep C while still using and that we do not lose the right to treatment if we get hep C again. We ran peer / nurse testing and treatment partnerships at three sites across Victoria and we are still working in West Melbourne out of an outreach bus, testing and treating people. We have a number of fantastic peer workers that did or are doing the work of reaching out to the community and bringing them to the sites for discussions with a nurse. I want to highlight Lesa, Zenn, Amanda and now Mark who have contributed to the success of this project by being amazing communicators and all-around stars.</p> <p>Programs like our NSP and our outreach peer education programs that work with community health and other community service providers were hamstrung by the Omicron outbreak in late 2022. Many healthcare providers remained open but did not allow outside organisations like ours back in for many months following that (hopefully) last outbreak. I couldn’t quite believe it was so recent until I checked the dates.</p> <p>The PAMS team are used to crises and as the lack of pharmacotherapy prescribers has tipped over into almost permanent crisis mode, it is amazing to see how integral the PAMS team are to helping coordinated responses to these crises in Victoria. They help hundreds and thousands of people remain on pharmacotherapy every year. Although we have had the great victory of dosing being subsidised by the Commonwealth PBS scheme finally, the team has barely slowed down, despite financial issues being a major issue of concern until the changes occurred.</p>			

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	<p>I want to thank Bee Hayes for coordinating DanceWize until November last year and Nick Wallis for stepping up to coordinate the program in an interim role until the end of the last season, ably supported by Aly Anketell. I'm happy that Nick is now in the role permanently and is working on sustainability and has welcomed Jaz into the team. They are working on building communication and engagement with the Key Peer Educator volunteers and welcoming the range of skills and inputs they have into the future of the program. This program has never been funded sustainably with funding for just 2 full time positions spread across three team members.</p> <p>We rely heavily on our volunteer's good will and skills and on fees from promoters. But this is a leading harm reduction program that other states and countries want to emulate. It is frustrating to see these programs being funded sustainably when the originator is not. In these conditions, the work of the team, the KPEs and Mae and her gender-based violence counselling program volunteers is even more a testament to the strength of community. Working on improving this situation is a key priority for the year coming up. Once more, a big thank you to our communities, staff and volunteers, our supporters, allies and funders.</p> <p>I'm looking forward to working with you all again in 2024.</p>			
<p>6. Treasurer's Financial Report 2022-2023</p>	<p>HRVic Treasurer's Report – Fiscal Year 2023 – delivered by Peter Higgs</p> <p>This is my second year as Treasurer of Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic), after being elected as a Board Member in 2021.</p> <p>Dr Chooi Beh - Chartered Accountant conducted the audit for fiscal year 2023. He delivered a satisfactory report with no concerns raised regarding organisational management of finances. HRVic is able to pay all of its debts as and when they become due and payable.</p> <p>This year, HRVic implemented a new budgeting technique which assisted in distinguishing between certain organisational and program income and expenditure. This is noted as "Levy Income" and "Levy Expense" on the Detailed Management Profit & Loss Accounts page of the</p>			

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	<p>audited financials in equivalent amounts of \$844,780. This technique is strictly for accounting and internal purposes and is not indicative of actual additional income or expenses.</p> <p>HRVic has had a sound financial year with a deficit of \$48,247. The most significant expenses were Employee Expenses (salaries & on-costs) of \$1,423,398. In addition to these expenses, we see expenditure on Volunteer Reimbursements of \$57,284, which is an indicator of HRVic’s engagement with and valuing of the community. Lastly, there was \$63,913 spent on Events & Programs, further reflecting HRVic’s involvement in & support of our community.</p> <p>This year, HRVic received \$1,416,807 from the Victorian State Government (VSG) in the form of government grants. In addition to this, the GiA income of \$860,342 is primarily made up of VSG grants from previous years that were permitted to be held over and expended this fiscal year. We also received smaller but still significant pieces of income for various fee-for-service and other projects. We thank the VSG as well as the Burnet Institute & DanceWize event promoters in particular for their support.</p> <p>Accumulated Funds remain steady at \$806,067 for the year.</p> <p>We have deposited some funds into short term deposits which interest can be used to pay for things like conference tickets for staff & volunteers that we otherwise would not be able to afford.</p> <p>In summary, it has been another successful year for HRVic, and I would like to thank the HRVic staff and Board as well as our accounts consultants for their support and assistance throughout the year.</p>			

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	<p style="text-align: center;">Treasurer's Financial Report FY2023</p> <p>Income of 3,348,781 (less 844,780 Levy Income)= \$2,504,011 Expenditure of 3,397,028 (less 844,780 Levy Expenses) = \$2,552,248 Total Deficit for year \$48,247 Salaries of \$1.4m = 56% of Expenditure Volunteer Reimbursement = \$57,284 Events & Programs = \$63,913</p> <p>Majority of Income from State Government = \$1,416,087 Grants in Advance (also VSG) = \$860,342 or In total, 91% of Income is from VSG Current Ratio 1.3 (for every dollar we owe we have 1.30)</p> <hr/> <p>Motion to accept the Audited Financials as a true & accurate reflection of HRVic' monetary position.</p>	Peter Higgs	Rob Dwyer	All in favour. Peter Higgs declared motion moved
7. Appointment of Auditors for 2023-2024 Financial Year	Motion to appoint CH Accountants as auditors for 2024	Peter Higgs	Caro Weidner	All in favour Peter Higgs declared motion moved
8. Board Vacancies	<p>Katia Lallo chaired this section of the meeting as Rob Dwyer was one of the nominees. This year, we have 3 vacancies and 3 nominations:</p> <p>Robyn Dwyer Peter Higgs Gaby Bruning</p> <p>They each talked a little bit about themselves & why they would like to remain on the board & have nominated again.</p>			

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	<p>Because there are only 3 vacancies & 3 nominations, a vote is not needed. As there were no objections to each of these board members continuing to be on the board, the three members nominated were deemed to be elected.</p>			<p>No objections</p>
<p>9. Other Business</p>	<p>None</p>			
<p>10. Guest Speaker, Chris Gough</p>	<p>Chris Gough – Executive Director of CAHMA in Canberra, ACT Q&A with Sione Crawford re: ACT’s decimalisation reforms that came into effect October 2023</p> <p>Simple cannabis offense notice January 2020 – law reform around cannabis, decriminalising it Can possess 50g & grow 2 plants, max 4 per household</p> <p>The following year, private member’s bill was put forth – simple drug offense notice CAHMA wanted to go straight to “over 18 exemption” Passed through Nov/Dec 2022 – 12 month implementation period; began Oct 28 this year</p> <p>Legislation was really disappointing – lots of highs & lows on this journey. July last year, gov’t put out the bill & didn’t take notice a lot of what CAHMA said. Created small quantity thresholds (ex 1g heroin) which is what we ended up with. CAHMA had to assess whether to support the bill. Consulted with 13 other orgs about this. CAHMA decided to support this. Overall, thought our people would be better off with the bill.</p> <p>Greens put up amendments based on what CAHMA suggested. Put up 3-4 and they did all get voted down but still a good step that they actually got put up.</p> <p>ACT Health, Access Canberra, ACT Police – CAHMA had to work with all of these groups.</p> <p>When talking with the police, the only thing that they could grasp was the health aspects of this new legislation (ie, didn’t think it was a human right) – but at least they did grasp that...</p> <p>Lots of media engagement – Guardian, etc every week</p>			

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	<p>Audience Questions.</p> <p>Q from Peter Higgs: what about the purity aspect? A: For the majority of drugs, it doesn't matter what the purity level is. Still only 1g heroin, etc. Even if they do it based on purity, the wait time is 6-8 months to get it analysed. (there is one exception). However, they don't have scales on them to weigh the drug and primarily will send the person to do the 1-hour assessment.</p> <p>Q: Whats involved in the assessment with Canberra Health Service A: kinda like a check-in with the person – then a referral / harm reduction advice in. CAHMA has asked to be put on the support list but can't get CHS to get them to send people to CAHMA / CHS is stigmatising towards CAHMA</p> <p>Q: are there any obligations during the assessment A: the assessment discharges your obligation; ie, after the 1 hour, you're done</p> <p>Q: is this only a 1-time thing? A: no, it's limitless</p> <p>Q: any evidence of the quality being stronger since the quantity for decrim so low (ie 1g heroin)? A: no, not yet</p> <p>Q: does the drug user community know how this all works? A: this is a big thing. Had to do a lot of media & communication with local news. Did paper pamphlets. Across all of drug & alcohol treatment, NSP, social media, etc. This is something that we will still have to continue working on.</p> <p>Discussion about the implementation plan.</p> <p>Q: what is worth it? A: Yes it was. Community definitely better off. By no means is it perfect. One of the unintended consequences of decrim is that you end up with ppl who use drugs and are sick/ need help... then morally corrupt dealers who are leeching off them. So will need to address</p>			

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	<p>that. Also, what can we get now that we've opened up a space where we can talk to the police.</p> <p>Q: was there any resourcing provided by the govt? A: no, its been bollacs (?) first year, no \$. 10 days before the deadline, they asked CAHMA to be involved...</p> <p>Continued on with Q&A with the audience around the details of the legislation.</p>			
11. Stigma Videos	Video – Stigma Videos, Health Promotion Team & Conor Ashleigh – HepC Testing & Treatment; the actual videos will drop in January but wanted to show the making/behind the scenes of the 5 Stigma videos 😊			

Time meeting closed	5:37PM
Chair signature	<div style="text-align: right;">-----/-----/-----</div>