



The Authentic Voice Of and For Victorians Who Use Drugs  
**NOTHING ABOUT US - WITHOUT US!**

ABN: 46 114 268 362

## **Overdoses keep on killing us – it is time to change**

**HARM REDUCTION VICTORIA PUBLIC STATEMENT 31 August 2022**

Join us - on August 31st at 11AM a community rally will be held on the Victorian Parliament Steps to mark International Overdose Awareness Day.

There is a drug overdose crisis in this country and our drug laws are not stopping it. The number of Australians who die from unintentional drug overdose each year continues to outstrip the road-toll. Harm Reduction Victoria is a voice for those with living experience of drug use. These are our community members who are still dying.

The Victorian Coroner's Report released on August 30, shows a slight decrease to the lowest numbers since 2016. We welcome initiatives such as funded naloxone provision in Victoria but to arrest the rise and reverse the trend permanently we must consider further responses.

**Australia's current approach to drugs is dominated by the police and law-enforcement, focusing on criminalising individuals and marginalised communities for their drug use. Only 2% of resources go to harm reduction with 66% to law enforcement. Yet we know that "we can't arrest our way out of this..."**

Around the world there is growing evidence that criminalisation drives overdose: it stops people seeking help when they need it and reduces investment in effective health and education services.

International Overdose Awareness Day founder Sally Finn, speaks for many workers when she says, *"harm reduction alcohol and drug services are not funded properly, and when punitive systems continue to operate in light of the evidence that they do not work, then we feel cornered, blinded, with one hand tied behind our backs."*

Sam, who uses drugs, says, *"There is so much to lose from being honest about our drug use, with society as it is today. We see it in our community. You can lose your kids, your future, and end up in prison. So we end up using secretly, behind locked doors, and dying alone from overdoses"*

*"Drug criminalisation is a serious problem for Australia"* says Sione Crawford, HRVic CEO. *"We spend billions on law enforcement, stoking fear and discrimination that in turn drives secrecy and unsafe drug use. All while harm reduction programs are drastically under-resourced and so cannot appropriately respond to the diverse, complex and legitimate needs of people who use drugs."*

On behalf of our community, Harm Reduction Victoria calls for:

- 1. The full decriminalisation of drugs and a rethink of Victorian and Australian drug policies.**
- 2. A rapid balancing of funds towards evidence-based health promotion that includes peer-based overdose prevention education away from the War on Drugs**

## References:

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- [5] Dale, A. (2022), ['We can't arrest our way out of this': experts renew call for drug law reform - Law Society Journal \(lsj.com.au\)](#)
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- [8] Greer, A. (2021), [Decriminalizing drug use is a necessary step, but it won't end the opioid overdose crisis \(theconversation.com\)](#)
- [9] 360Edge Australia (2021), [Why Drug Use Shouldn't Be A Crime | 360Edge](#)
- [10] <https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/CCOV%20-%20Overdose%20deaths%20in%20Victoria%202012-2021%20-%202030Aug2022.pdf>