

Should drug injecting rooms be established in built-up areas?

What they said...

'I've come to accept that a safe injecting facility can work and can save some lives for addicts, but at this stage we're putting the lives of addicts ahead of the lives of the residents and the kids'

Neil Mitchell, 3AW radio host

'The advice from the [nearby] school community and the principal is that the number of syringes found in the area has significantly decreased since the time of the medically supervised injecting room'

James Merlino, acting premier and Victorian Education Minister

The issue at a glance

On March 25, 2021, the government of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) announced it was considering establishing a medically supervised drug injection room in Canberra. Community consultation will be undertaken before a decision is made.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7182838/act-government-to-consult-on-injection-room/>

Two days previously, on March 23, 2021, it was reported that a series of incidents, including the death of a drug-affected man outside a local primary school, had led to parents demanding that the Victorian Government relocate the North Richmond drug injecting centre.

<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/richmond-west-primary-parents-hold-crisis-talks-as-photos-reveal-drug-horror-outside-school/news-story/6d7a3b6c11a86016061a7c60dd6ce8a8>

Though the value of drug injecting centres is more generally accepted than when the first was set up in Kings Cross in 2001, the question of where they should be placed and what impact they have on surrounding communities remains hotly debated.

Background

The information below is abbreviated from two sources. The Australian information is taken from the Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation site. It can be accessed at

<https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres/> The European information comes from the Wikipedia entry titled 'Supervised injection site'. The Wikipedia entry also gives information about injection centres in Canada and the United States which is not included below. The full Wikipedia entry can be accessed at

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supervised_injection_site

Medically Supervised Injection Centres (MSICs) in Australia

Medically Supervised Injecting Centres (MSICs) are places where people inject drugs, such as heroin or methamphetamine (ice), under the supervision of medical staff and health professionals. MSICs are also referred to as supervised injecting facilities, drug consumption rooms, injecting rooms, or safe injecting facilities. Australia currently has two MSICs, one in Kings Cross, Sydney, established in 2001 and one North Richmond, Melbourne, established in 2018. The Victorian government has indicated that it plans to establish a second MSIC in the state, in the City of Melbourne.

Benefits of MSICs

While acknowledging that injecting drugs is not considered 'safe', MSICs allow for a safer environment for people to inject drugs, access emergency care (if required) and obtain sterile injecting equipment. These centres also offer broader health services and pathways into rehabilitation, treatment, and other essential services.

Over an 18-month period, it was estimated that the North Richmond Centre was accessed by 119,000 people, successfully managed 3,200 overdoses, saved an estimated 21 to 27 lives, and provided screening, assessment and treatment initiation and monitoring of blood-borne viruses to approximately 300 people. Staff provided 10,540 services beyond the supervision of injecting during the trial period. This was most commonly health promotion, dressing wounds, providing medication and first aid. It also provided social welfare needs, mental health, counselling and family violence support.

Since the MSIC opened in 2001 through to June 2020, there have been more than 1 million injections supervised and more than 8500 overdoses managed without a fatality. In a 2010 report, current clients reported an increase in knowledge of the risk of spread of blood-borne viruses and described behavioural changes that reflect safer injecting practices to minimise this risk. More than 14,500 referrals have been made, connecting clients to health, drug treatment and social welfare services. Among frequently attending clients, 80 percent have ultimately accepted a referral for treatment.

Impact on the local community

In North Richmond, community perceptions around seeing discarded needles and syringes and other drug-related paraphernalia did not change. There were anecdotal reports of increased crime, and during the trial period support for the centre reduced.¹ However, along with the recent extension of the trial period, the Victorian Government also announced a \$9 million investment to undertake neighbourhood renewal and improve the area around the North Richmond facility to alleviate concerns.

In Kings Cross, the number of publicly discarded needles and syringes approximately halved after the centre opened, 70 percent of local businesses and 78 percent of local residents supported the centre's existence, and it was found that it had no impact on crime in the Kings Cross area.

Supervised injecting centres in Europe

The first professionally staffed service where drug injection was accepted emerged in the Netherlands during the early 1970s as part of the 'alternative youth service' provided by the St. Paul's church in Rotterdam. At its peak it had two centers that combined an informal meeting place with a drop-in center providing basic health care, food and a laundering service. One of the centers was also a pioneer in providing needle-exchange. Its purpose was to improve the psychosocial function and health of its clients. The centers received some support from law enforcement and local government officials, although they were not officially sanctioned until 1996.

The first modern supervised consumption site was opened in Berne, Switzerland in June, 1986. Part of a project combatting HIV, the general concept of the café was a place where simple meals and beverages would be served, and information on safe sex, safe drug use, condoms and clean needles provided. Social workers providing counselling and referrals

were also present. An injection room was not originally conceived; however, drug users began to use the facility for this purpose, and this soon became the most attractive aspect of the café. After discussions with the police and legislature, the café was turned into the first legally sanctioned drug consumption facility provided that no one under the age of 18 was admitted.

During the 1990s additional legal facilities emerged in other cities in Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. In the first decade of 2000, facilities opened in Spain, Luxembourg, and Norway. At the beginning of 2009 there were 92 facilities operating in 61 cities, including 30 cities in the Netherlands, 16 cities in Germany and 8 cities in Switzerland. Denmark passed a law allowing municipalities to run "fix rooms" in 2012, and by the end of 2013 there were three open. However, some of the very rationale for the projects in Sydney and Vancouver are specifically to gather data, as they are created as scientific pilot projects. The approach at the centers is also more clinical in nature, as they provide supervision by staff equipped and trained to administer oxygen or naloxone in the case of a heroin or other opioid overdose.

Internet information

On March 30, 2021, The Herald Sun published a comment by former Victorian premier Jeff Kennett titled 'Site of Richmond safe injecting room next to primary school "totally inappropriate".'

Kennett supports supervised injecting centres in principle; however, he considers that the location of the North Richmond facility is a mistake. Kennett was formerly a member of a panel charged with evaluating the facility. He withdrew from the panel prematurely for personal reasons.

The full text of the comment can be accessed at

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/kennett-site-of-richmond-safe-injecting-room-next-to-primary-school-totally-inappropriate/news-story/f3d893930fcea9bf6e1c007057ba2a6a>

On March 25, 2021, ABC News published a report titled 'Richmond West Primary School lockdowns linked to safe injecting room prompts crisis meeting of parents.' The report details a meeting of local Richmond parents calling for the shifting of an injecting centre following incidents that suggest it poses a danger to a nearby school.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-25/parent-concerns-richmond-west-primary-safe-injecting-room/100027572>

On March 23, 2021, news.com.au published a report titled 'Richmond West Primary parents hold crisis talks as photos reveal drug horror outside school'. The report details the concerns of parents following two recent incidents involving the injection centre located near a local school, which appeared to put students at risk.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/richmond-west-primary-parents-hold-crisis-talks-as-photos-reveal-drug-horror-outside-school/news-story/6d7a3b6c11a86016061a7c60dd6ce8a8>

On March 19, 2021, The Herald Sun published a comment by Rita Panahi titled 'We must protect our kids from shocking drug scenes'. The writer argues that the Richmond injecting centre should not be in a residential area near a school. The piece also appears to object to injecting rooms in principle, irrespective of their location.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/rita-panahi/rita-panahi-we-must-protect-our-kids-from-shocking-drug-scenes/news-story/239daf07943b5ed95920b8167e4c89ad>

On January 21, 2021, The Herald Sun published a comment by Dee Ryall, a risk and governance specialist and former state Liberal MP, titled 'Second safe injecting room in Melbourne is not necessarily the answer'. The opinion piece analyses the inconclusive nature of the data regarding overdoses at the North Richmond facility and the apparent failure of the facility to reduce local crime and improve the local area.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/dee-ryall-second-safe-injecting-room-in-melbourne-is-not-necessarily-the-answer/news-story/eb234d7efb471cfddb193f26e4c24c9a>

On June 22, 2020, the Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation issued a media release titled 'Medically supervised injecting centres save lives' which explained why the Foundation welcomed the Victorian government's decision to extend the trial of the Richmond injection facility for a further three years.

The full text of the article can be accessed at <https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres/>

On June 11, 2020, Crikey posted a comment by Nick Carr, a Melbourne-based GP, author and broadcaster, titled 'The case for safe injecting rooms is clear cut — they save valuable lives' which supports injecting rooms and argues for treating drug users with compassion and understanding.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.crikey.com.au/2020/06/11/the-case-for-safe-injecting-rooms-is-clear-cut-they-save-valuable-lives/>

On June 10, 2020, the ABC posted a transcript of a segment of its media analysis program Media Watch which accused The Herald Sun of unfairly reporting on the operation of the North Richmond injecting facility. The article maintains that The Herald Sun has inaccurately suggested that the centre was not effectively addressing heroin-related issues in its area. The report is titled 'Media reporting on the Medically Supervised Injecting Room: To whom are they accountable?'.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.aodmediawatch.com.au/more-poor-reporting-from-the-herald-sun-on-the-melbourne-medically-supervised-injecting-room-to-whom-are-they-accountable/>

On June 9, 2020, the Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres issued a media release titled 'Federation welcomes Medically Supervised Injecting Rooms announcement'. The Federation supported the opening of a second injecting facility as a way of saving lives and as a way of directing people struggling with addiction to health, legal and social support services.

The full text can be found at <https://www.fclc.org.au/federation-welcomes-medically-supervised-injecting-rooms-announcement>

In 2019 The Police Association of Victoria released the results of a members' survey of officers working in the vicinity of the Richmond injecting facility which showed their belief that certain types of crime in the area had increased.

A report on the survey can be accessed at <https://tpav.org.au/news/journals/2019-journals/june/safe-injecting-rooms>

On October 29, 2019, Monash University's Lens published an article titled 'Richmond's safe-injecting room: Controversy overshadows positive community impact' which outlines some of the benefits that the facilities had given Richmond drug users and the local community. The full text can be accessed at <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2019/10/29/1378003/richmonds-safe-injecting-room-controversy-overshadows-positive-community-impact>

On October 24, 2019, The Conversation published an opinion piece by Rick Lines, Associate Professor of Criminology and Human Rights, Swansea University, titled 'Safe injection rooms save lives – yet the UK government continues to oppose them'. The comment presents international evidence in favour of establishing injecting rooms and suggests that they are opposed by some conservative politicians despite the evidence of their value.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/safe-injection-rooms-save-lives-yet-the-uk-government-continues-to-oppose-them-124952>

On May 23, 2019, The Conversation published an opinion piece by Inderveer Mahal, Family physician and Global Journalism Fellow, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto, titled 'Without safe injection sites, more opioid users will die'. Dr Mahal challenges the decision of the Ontario government to cease funding several injection facilities despite a dramatic recent increase in the number of overdose deaths in the province. She criticises decisions being taken that are not supported by evidence. The full text of the comment can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/without-safe-injection-sites-more-opioid-users-will-die-115979>

On May 16, 2019, Herald Sun commentator outlined a series of objections to the Richmond injecting centre in his online blog published under the Herald Sun's masthead. The entry is titled 'BIG SURPRISE: INJECTING ROOM FAIL' and presents several reasons for why Bolt believes the facility has not succeeded in addressing the problem of illicit drug-taking. The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/andrew-bolt/big-surprise-injecting-room-fail/news-story/9bab869fea2062226e3c95f378a425762>

On November 22, 2018, NewsGP, the news organ of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) published a report titled, 'Doctors opposed to plan to scrap injecting room'. The report details the opposition of many doctors to the Victorian Liberal's plan to close the North Richmond injecting centre. The article cites Doctor Cameron Loy, the Chair of RACGP Victoria.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/doctors-opposed-to-plan-to-scrap-injecting-room>

On May 20, 2018, just prior to the opening of the North Richmond injecting centre, Elle Vee set up a change.org petition opposing the location of the facility. <https://www.change.org/p/relocate-north-richmond-drug-injecting-facility-away-from-primary-school-and-residential-area/u/22768128> The petition has been updated twice since in response to changing events, most recently on March 22, 2021. <https://www.change.org/p/move-the-injecting-room-away-from-primary-school-and-residential-area/u/28751595> As of April 25, 2021, it had attracted 2,677 signatures.

On April 20, 2018, The Australian published a comment by associate editor John Ferguson titled 'Jeff Kennett resignation from safe drug clinics role will kill policy'.

The article argues that the resignation of the former Victorian Liberal premier, Jeff Kennett, from the evaluative panel for the Richmond injecting centre will allow the Victorian Liberal Party to attack the centre. The article supports the centre as a way of saving the lives of drug users.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/jeff-kennett-resignation-from-safe-drug-clinics-role-will-kill-policy/news-story/58f730537039aa7ffa0687b1d556df9b>

On April 15, 2018, The Daily Telegraph published an opinion piece by Peta Credlin, former prime ministerial chief of staff for Tony Abbott and currently a commentator on Sky News. Credlin's comment is titled 'Andrews is only making our drug crisis worse' objects to the North Richmond injecting room for undermining the message that illicit drugs are dangerous, addictive and potentially fatal.

The full text of Credlin's comment can be found at

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/andrews-is-only-making-our-drug-crisis-worse/news-story/d330a42b73cd6e0930f7e052720a9543>

On June 6, 2017, Junkee published an opinion piece titled 'Australia Is Lagging Behind on Safe Injecting Rooms and It's Killing People' which explained Australia's position in providing assistance for drug users and suggested how it might be improved.

The full text can be accessed at <https://junkee.com/safe-injecting-rooms-government/107954>

In 2017, Deakin University's magazine, 'this.', published an article by Dr Matthew Dunn, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University and Professor Peter Miller, Faculty of Health, School of Psychology, Deakin University. The article is titled 'How safe injecting rooms will benefit the community' and argues for the benefits to be derived from establishing a supervised injecting facility in North Richmond.

The full text can be accessed at <https://this.deakin.edu.au/society/should-we-introduce-safe-injecting-rooms>

Arguments in favour of injecting rooms in built-up areas

1. Injecting rooms in built-up areas reduce the drug-related pollution and public drug-taking witnessed by residents

Supporters of medically supervised injecting centres (MSICs) argue that they do not bring addicts into an area. Rather, they claim, injecting facilities are only set up where there is a significant pre-existing drug culture. They further argue that these centres serve to reduce the community's distress at public drug-taking and the visible pollution associated with drug use on the streets of the affected area.

It is claimed that injecting rooms are established to address an already established problem, that is, they are set up to assist large numbers of drug users in an area where they already congregate. Prior to the establishment of the North Richmond facility, the Victorian corner had twice drawn attention to the need for a medically supervised injecting room (MSIR) in that vicinity. 34 people had died of drug overdoses in a four-block area near Victoria Street in one 12-month period. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-27/spike-in-heroin-deaths-in-victoria-safe-injecting-rooms/9092660> This area overlaps the location where the Richmond MSIR is now situated. The medically supervised service is currently run at North Richmond

Community Health, which was already handing out a million syringes every month before the MSIR was set up. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-31/daniel-andrews-backflips-on-richmond-safe-injecting-room-trial/9102334>

Prior to the establishment of the Richmond facility, the Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation argued, ‘The supervised injecting centre will reduce the discarded needles in the [school] playground, it will reduce the likelihood of primary school children being exposed to drug using, it will reduce the open drug using scene. This is based on fact. There are over 220 peer review papers that show facilities like this work.’ <https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres-dispelling-the-myths/> Where drug-taking is not monitored it is claimed it is likely to have a larger impact on local communities. An Occasional Paper tabled in the Victorian Parliament in March 2000, titled ‘Safe Injecting Facilities’ stated, ‘Street-level use is typified by users making quick, small purchases of heroin or cocaine...and then consuming the drug very soon after, and very close to the point of purchase – often in close-by streets, secluded laneways, or public toilet facilities. In Smith St. Collingwood, for instance, 68 percent of syringes collected from syringe disposal bins are collected from bins in public toilets.

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/dcpc/Gov_Drug_ref_Strat_Tide/Occasional_Paper_2_Safe_Injecting_Facilities.pdf

Once the Richmond facility had been set up, its supporters have claimed that it has succeeded in reducing some of the drug-related pollution the community faced because of drug-taking in the area. James Merlino, the acting Victorian premier and Minister for Education, has noted that the school situated next to the injecting room has reported significant improvements since the room was set up. Mr Merlino has stated, ‘The advice from the school community and the principal is that the number of syringes found in the area has significantly decreased since the time of the medically supervised injecting room – there’s [less] drug paraphernalia and fewer incidents of anti-social behaviour.’ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/traumatised-mother-dialled-triple0-as-drug-user-outside-north-richmond-injecting-room-lay-motionless/news-story/672e68cc2e9f9997ca4ada2cf1f068ef> It has been noted that ,medically supervised injection centres(MSICs) spare the community the distress of seeing users inject in public places. A review of the Kings Cross MSIC noted ‘49 percent (of those who used the facility) indicated that they would have injected in public had they not been able to access the Sydney MSIC on the day of registration. Based on these data an estimated 191,673 public injections were averted by the presence of the MSIC.’

<https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf>

Anne-Maree Kaser, chief executive officer of Windana, a St Kilda based organisation that works with people to assist them in recovering from a dependency on drugs or alcohol has similarly pointed to what she claims are the benefits that have been gained from establishing a supervised injecting centre in North Richmond. Ms Kaser stated, ‘You see the amenity of the local community improve. Less needles and syringes, fewer ambulance call outs. Spend any time in St Kilda and you’ll hear the constant wailing of sirens. We should expect to see far fewer people experience harm and die [if a facility were established in St Kilda].’

https://medium.com/@edcook_1690/why-st-kilda-needs-a-medically-supervised-injecting-room-1c9bb51e3433

Other defenders of the North Richmond injecting facilities argue that claims the centre has made the community less safe and more polluted are inaccurate. 86-year-old Katrin Ogilvy, who has lived in York Street for 42 years has stated, ‘The stories that as an old person you can’t go down Lennox Street without getting into deep trouble is not true.’

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/no-danger-not-all-richmond-residents-want-safe-injecting-room-moved-20191119-p53bvw.html>

Another Richmond resident, Karen Hovenga, has indicated that she used to watch a procession of drug users come into her front

yard every morning to use her garden tap for water to shoot up heroin. However, she has claimed that this stopped abruptly when the safe injecting room opened in June 2018 about 100 metres from her home in Smith Street. She has stated, 'There hasn't been a syringe in my front yard since the centre opened. I often feel like I am living in a different neighbourhood to people who talk negatively, who talk about terrible things.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/no-danger-not-all-richmond-residents-want-safe-injecting-room-moved-20191119-p53bvw.html>

The Kings Cross injecting facility appears to be part of a scheme which works systematically to reduce the impact of drug-related pollution on local communities. A primary health care service in Kings Cross, provides a Needle Clean Up service which collects discarded needles and syringes in Eastern Sydney and Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and Woolloomooloo on weekdays. A designated worker collects any injecting equipment discarded in public locations identified as "hot spots", which are monitored and adjusted when patterns of public injecting change. Most hot spots are located within a 500-metre radius of the Sydney MSIC. The worker also responds to calls from the public to the New South Wales Needle Clean Up Hotline. <https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf>

2. Injecting rooms in built-up areas reduce the drug-related dangers faced by residents
Supporters of medically supervised injecting centres (MSICs) claim that these facilities make the local community safer – reducing the risk of needle stick injuries and violent anti-social behaviour sometimes associated with drug taking.

It has been noted that some of the behaviour associated with drug-taking, such as the careless disposal of used syringes, poses as significant risk for local communities which supervised injecting facilities can help to reduce. It has been claimed, for example, that the pre-existing drug problem in North Richmond created major public safety issues for the inhabitants of this area. Victorian state coroner, Sara Hinchley, told a parliamentary inquiry in June 2017 that the extent of unmonitored drug use in North Richmond placed the rest of the community at risk. She gave the example of a Richmond toddler who was stabbed by a needle that had been left in the tanbark at his childcare centre. The coroner stated, 'That was a very disturbing incident for his family and an example of why it is not just something that should be looked at as an aesthetic issue, but also as a health-related issue for those who are exposed to the debris associated with injecting drug use.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-15/daniel-andrews-opposes-injecting-room-trial-in-victoria/8709130>

Paramedics and others seeking to assist drug users suffering an overdose in an unsupervised street environment have been said to be placed at similar risk. In October 2017, a paramedic treating an unconscious heroin patient on a street in South Yarra received a needlestick injury to her finger while lifting the patient. The hospital to which he was taken later confirmed the patient was HIV+ and had Hepatitis C and there were fears the paramedic may have been infected. Those seeking a second supervised injecting centre in Melbourne saw this incident as evidence of the need, arguing that drug taking not only affects users but also the communities within which they live and the paramedics who are first on the scene to treat overdose patients. https://medium.com/@edcook_1690/why-st-kilda-needs-a-medically-supervised-injecting-room-1c9bb51e3433

Injecting facilities with properly organised and staffed clean up services have been claimed to be an important means of reducing the risk associated with needlestick injuries, such as contracting AIDS or hepatitis C. A 2017 submission from the Victorian AIDS Council to an Inquiry into Medically Supervising Injecting Centres noted, 'At the Sydney [Medically Supervised Injecting] site, where a nearby health service provides a needle clean-up service, the number of needles collected within 500 metres of the MSIC has decreased by almost 50 per cent since the establishment of the centre. This results in an improvement in the public

amenity in the area, and a reduction in the risk of needlestick injuries and potential exposure to BBVs (blood borne viruses).’

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Injecting_Centres/Submissions/S39-VAC.pdf

It has been further claimed that the anti-social behaviours of some drug users are better handled by staff at a supervised injecting centre than they are occurring on the street where members of the public might be endangered. A review of the Kings Cross injecting facilities conducted six years after it had begun operation found that there had been ‘36 behavioural issues requiring removal from the premises; 62 acts involving violence/harassment; four acts of vandalism/theft and 141 other episodes noted by staff as “adverse events.”

<https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf> Supporters of the service argue that without it all these ‘events’ would have occurred in an unsupervised and so more dangerous manner on the streets of Kings Cross. A closer look at the operation of the Kings Cross Centre shows that it has been particularly effective at reducing the risks to the public associated with the use of crystal methamphetamine. An article published in The Australian on April 20, 2018, noted, ‘Despite meth injections [at the Kings Cross facility] having soared from a monthly rate of 268 in January 2012 to 1212 in June 2017, rates of abuse and aggression are trending down. In the 10 months to June 2017 there were eight cases of abuse or aggression at the Sydney facility. In four months, there was nothing. So, the injection use soars, and the incidents fall in trend terms.’

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/jeff-kennett-resignation-from-safe-drug-clinics-role-will-kill-policy/news-story/58f730537039aa7ffa0687b1d556df9b> A article published by the Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation on April 22, 2018, suggests that supervised injecting centres, because of the regulated environment that they provide, contribute to a reduction in the violence often associated with the use of methamphetamines. It stated, ‘The very nature of the [Kings Cross] centre allows for the drug user to remain in the centre in a calm, safe space post injection.’ <https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres-dispelling-the-myths/>

3. Injecting rooms save the lives of drug takers

Supporters of medically supervised injecting centres (MSICs) argue that their primary function is to save the lives of drug users by helping them to recover from overdoses and by linking them to medical services which can help them with health issues such as hepatitis and also help them to recover from addiction.

Supporters of supervised injecting centres stress their importance in saving the lives of drug users. After the North Richmond injecting room was opened in 2018, a government spokesperson stated, ‘The medically supervised injecting room was established to save lives and reduce the harm caused by drugs – which is exactly what the data shows it’s doing.’

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/i-saw-the-sheet-over-the-body-parents-call-for-injecting-centre-to-be-moved-away-from-school-20210324-p57dj9.html>

In November 2018, four months into the operation of the medically supervised injection room (MSIR) in North Richmond, it was claimed to have saved the lives of many of its clients. Dr Nico Clark, Medical Director of the safe-injecting room, stated, ‘We [have] had 18,800 visits; more than 1,500 separate people have come through. We’ve had 321 overdoses in the first four months, 61 of which required naloxone. We have needed to call an ambulance for only five of those...’ Dr Clark further suggested that had the Richmond centre not been open many of the hundreds of overdose victims may have died. He stated, ‘If there had been no room the last four months, that would have been another 20,000 injections that would have taken place elsewhere. We know there are approximately 20 fatal opiate overdoses a year in Richmond, and [we don’t want] to take the chance that somebody would find them.

<https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/doctors-opposed-to-plan-to-scrap-injecting-room> These positive results have continued through the centre's first nine months and then its first year and a half of operation. In June 2019, Reason Party MLC Fiona Patten, detailed some of the life-saving interventions made by the Richmond injecting centre during nine months of operation. She noted that the centre had managed more than 1,130 overdoses — an average of three a day. The staff at the injecting centre had carried out more than 3,300 health and social support interventions. More than 250 people had started opioid replacement treatment or had been referred to other forms of drug and alcohol treatment, while 40 had entered treatment for hepatitis. Ambulance data from February 2019 for callouts for North Richmond, revealed that callouts halved when the injecting centre was open.

<https://fionapatten.com.au/news/media-statement-injecting-centre-managed-1130-overdoses/> The results of an independent review of the centre's effectiveness found that after 18 months of work, the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond had safely managed 3,200 overdoses over 119,000 visits and saved at least 21 lives. The report also found that the North Richmond facility is the busiest supervised injecting room in Australia, with 4,350 clients registering since it opened. <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/news/review-panel-finds-medically-supervised-injecting-room-saving-lives>

The Kings Cross injecting facility has revealed a similar record of success in saving the lives of drug users. When it was reviewed in 2003, two years after it began operation, the Kings Cross facility was found to have treated more than 500 drug overdoses without a fatality.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/kings-cross-heroin-injecting-room-saved-lives-20030709-gdh2hj.html> Nineteen years after the Kings Cross centre had opened in 2001, the Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation noted there had been 'more than 1 million injections supervised and more than 8500 overdoses managed without a single fatality.' The ADF noted similar success with overseas facilities. Regarding the medically supervised centre that opened in Vancouver in 2003, the ADF noted, 'In operation since 2003, evaluations have demonstrated that this MSIC led to a 35 percent reduction in fatal overdoses in nearby areas.' <https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres/> A 2014 review of 75 studies examining the effectiveness of supervised injection centres found that as of the year of publication, no death had been reported at an injection site and overdoses had been reduced. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/09/07/645609248/whats-the-evidence-that-supervised-drug-injection-sites-save-lives>

Supporters of supervised injecting rooms argue that the lives they save should mean that their work is above politics and is supported by governments of all political persuasions. Referring specifically to the injecting centre in North Richmond, Dr Clark noted, 'I'd like to think that whatever government is formed after the [next] election, once it realises the benefits of the service, will certainly continue to trial it.' The same view has been expressed by Dr Cameron Loy, the chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Victoria. Dr Cameron has stated, 'The people dying from overdose in North Richmond were sons, daughters, brothers, parents, friends. Closing the safe injecting room places vulnerable Victorians at risk.' <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/doctors-opposed-to-plan-to-scrap-injecting-room>

4. Injecting rooms can assist drug takers to improve their health and overcome their addictions

Supporters of injecting facilities in built-up areas where drug takers gather argue that these services help drug users avoid a range of diseases and connect with programs that can assist them to overcome their addiction.

Supporters of supervised injecting centres stress their importance in allowing drug users to access a wide range of services. After the North Richmond injecting room was opened in

2018, a government spokesperson stated, ‘The medically supervised injecting room... is a vital gateway linking clients with other services including dental, mental health and housing – all the wrap-around support that clients need on the road to recovery.’

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/i-saw-the-sheet-over-the-body-parents-call-for-injecting-centre-to-be-moved-away-from-school-20210324-p57dj9.html>

In 2019, Reason Party MLC Fiona Patten, detailed some of the life-changing interventions made by the Richmond injecting centre during nine months of operation. She noted that the staff at the injecting centre had carried out more than 3,300 health and social support interventions. More than 250 people had started opioid replacement treatment or had been referred to other forms of drug and alcohol treatment, while 40 had entered treatment for hepatitis. <https://fionapatten.com.au/news/media-statement-injecting-centre-managed-1130-overdoses/>The results of an independent review of the North Richmond injecting centre’s effectiveness found that after 18 months of work, the staff of the medically supervised injecting room had provided more than 13,000 health and social support interventions for issues like mental health, housing and family violence.

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/news/review-panel-finds-medically-supervised-injecting-room-saving-lives>

It has been claimed that the access to additional services which supervised injecting rooms supply are uniquely valuable for people who live as marginalised an existence as many drug takers. In a review conducted after its first 18 months of operation, the North Richmond facility was found to have provided important screening, assessment and treatment initiation and monitoring of blood-borne viruses to approximately 300 people. Staff provided 10,540 services beyond the supervision of injecting during the trial period. This was most commonly health promotion, dressing wounds, providing medication and first aid. It also provided social welfare needs, mental health, counselling, and family violence support. Similar success has been reported by the Kings Cross Centre in encouraging its clients to adopt behaviours that reduce their risks. In a 2010 report, current clients reported an increase in knowledge of the risk of spread of blood-borne viruses and described behavioural changes that reflect safer injecting practices to minimise this risk. <https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres/> The Richmond Centre’s director, Dr Clark, has stated, ‘By providing a safe space for people to inject which, for a complicated set of reasons, is what they feel like they need to do, often on a daily basis, we are able to gain their trust and link them in with...other healthcare services.’ Dr Clark has indicated that this has been particularly important in the treatment of Hepatitis C to which heroin users are prone. Clark has stated, ‘Hepatitis C is a national and a global treatment priority now that we can cure it with these new direct-acting antivirals. We’ve set up a treatment pathway where we test them, and we organise and give them the medication. If we were able to systematically test everybody that has come through so far, that would be about 500 people, which would put Victoria over its targets.’

<https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/doctors-opposed-to-plan-to-scrap-injecting-room>

It has also been noted that in addition to directing drug users toward health and social support services, injecting centres are valuable in guiding clients toward treatments that can help them overcome their addictions. In July 2020, Dr Clark noted that about 100 clients at the North Richmond room were trying long-acting buprenorphine, a newly available treatment for heroin users. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/work-in-progress-richmond-s-safe-injecting-room-still-divides-two-years-on-20200630-p557ii.html> Similar success has been observed elsewhere in the clients of injecting facilities subsequently undergoing addiction treatment. A 2003-2004 study of the Vancouver injecting centre found that the safer injecting facility served as a referral centre for many community resources. More than 800

referrals were made each quarter (period of three months), and about 40 percent of referrals were for various forms of addiction treatment. <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/175/11/1399>

5. Injecting rooms are a harm minimisation strategy that is preferable to punitive approaches to drug taking

Many jurisdictions around the world appear to have decided that what is often termed ‘the war on drugs’ approach is a failed policy which has not resulted in the reduction of addiction or of the deaths and crime associated with drug taking. The war on drugs is essentially a criminalizing approach which makes drug-taking a crime and presents prohibition (banning) as a key element in reducing the problems linked to drug taking.

<https://www.vox.com/2016/5/8/18089368/war-on-drugs-marijuana-cocaine-heroin-meth>

Among the consequences of this approach has been a large increase in prison populations and a growth in crime. Though access to some drugs has been reduced, death and ill-health because of drug taking has grown. Critics have called for a rehabilitative approach which supports rather than blames the drug taker. Many have sought the decriminalisation of what have traditionally been designated as illegal substances and others have suggested full legalisation of all drugs. Injecting centres are part of this harm minimisation approach as they seek to reduce the harm drug seekers suffer because of their addiction.

<https://www.vox.com/2016/5/8/18089368/war-on-drugs-marijuana-cocaine-heroin-meth>

There are many doctors within Australia who support a harm minimisation approach. Dr Cameron Loy, the Chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Victoria, has indicated that he believes the issue of a safe-injecting room should be approached from a health perspective, rather than a criminal one. He has called on politicians to move away from their moral condemnation of drugs and to instead consider what policies would improve the health of drug takers and reduce the harm drugs cause. Referring to the Victorian Liberal Party’s growing opposition to the supervised injection centre in North Richmond, Dr Loy has stated, ‘It is disappointing. I had hoped we could have evidenced-based policy, not ideology-based policy.’

<https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/doctors-opposed-to-plan-to-scrap-injecting-room>

Anne-Maree Kaser, chief executive officer of Windana, a St Kilda based organisation that works with people to assist them in recovering from a dependency on drugs or alcohol, has expressed a similar view. She has stated, ‘As a society, many people in the community favour punishment and retribution over treatment and rehabilitation. I know which one works and costs a lot less. We achieve much better outcomes through treatment than locking people up in prison.’ https://medium.com/@edcook_1690/why-st-kilda-needs-a-medically-supervised-injecting-room-1c9bb51e3433

Though it is illegal to deal in many drugs in Australia (these are termed illicit drugs and include heroin and methamphetamines) and though there are limits to the quantity of illicit drugs which it is legal to possess, Australia has progressively moved toward a harm minimisation approach. The introduction to Australia’s current National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 states ‘Since its first iteration in 1985, Australia’s National Drug Strategy has been underpinned by an objective of minimising the harms associated with alcohol, tobacco, illicit drug and pharmaceutical drug use.’ Australia’s Strategy adopts what is referred to as the ‘three pillars of harm minimisation’. These are demand reduction (which includes restricting the advertising of addictive products and supporting recovery initiatives); supply reduction (which includes attempting to prevent the supply of illegal drugs and regulating the supply of legal ones); and harm minimisation (which involves reducing the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of drugs).

https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/national-drug-strategy-2017-2026_1.pdf

Supporters of this nationally adopted harm minimisation approach argue that supervised injecting rooms are an important element in this strategy. The current National Drug Strategy specifically nominates ‘medically supervised injecting centres and drug consumption rooms’ as a means of promoting safer injection practices. These facilities also assist in meeting several of the national strategy’s other objectives, including ‘BBV (blood borne viruses) and STI (sexually transmitted infections) testing, prevention, counselling, and treatment’; ‘preventing and responding to overdoses’; and aiding the police in implementing their policy ‘to exercise discretion when attending drug overdoses’.

https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/national-drug-strategy-2017-2026_1.pdf

It has been noted that few opponents of supervised injecting rooms any longer argue against them per se. They do not argue that these centres should never be established, rather they argue against where they are currently set up. The supporters of injecting rooms in built up areas argue that they need to be established in communities which drug users already frequent in large numbers. They also argue that this offers advantages for both drug users and others living and working in these areas. Professor Peter Miller, a director of the Deakin Centre for Drug, Alcohol and Addiction Research, has stated, ‘Punitive measures have never worked and lead to more deaths in users, more crime in the community and a more scared local population...[We need to respond] to the issue of addiction compassionately...making our streets safer for users and the community.’ <https://this.deakin.edu.au/society/should-we-introduce-safe-injecting-rooms>

Arguments against injecting rooms in built-up areas

1. Injecting rooms in built-up areas traumatize residents, including children

Those who oppose injecting rooms being established in built-up areas argue that these facilities do not protect residents from the trauma of living near large numbers of drug takers. Instead, they claim, these injecting rooms attract drug users and their activities into built up areas, distressing residents.

A resident who had lived in the Richmond area for 21-years as of 2020 described the difficulties posed by the location of the nearby injecting centre. She wrote, ‘The injecting facility is in a busy community health centre, and too close to a primary school where young children see drug taking and drug paraphernalia every day. Compounding things further, the injecting facility is near dense residential housing, including the huge housing commission high-rise estates on the corner of Church, Elizabeth and Lennox streets, in North Richmond.’

<https://neoskopos.com/en/168006/my-life-in-richmond-living-near-an-injecting-room/>

Objectors to these centres claim that they have created a traumatizing environment. At a public housing tenants' meeting, in June 2019, residents claimed that the Richmond injecting room had made their lives very difficult, with used needles littering the estate ‘like confetti’ and human faeces covering the stairs of the housing commission flats. One male Richmond resident stated in a comment sent to The Age and published on June 24, 2019, ‘I live on Lennox Street right next to the injecting room and have a child at the school. [Having the centre] next to a school is deplorable. Every day children see people injecting, defecating, swearing, fighting, hitting cars, damaging property. Users inject and then get in cars and drive past the school. Two cars have been driven on to the kerb with users slumped over the wheel unconscious.’ A female Richmond resident stated, ‘My family lives in constant fear since it [the injecting centre] opened. They see daily drug dealing, drug using and drug-affected people having drug fits in plain sight outside in public areas. It's in the wrong place, it needs to be moved. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/it-s-destroying-a-community-readers-have-say-on-injecting-room-20190624-p520pq.html> Similar complaints were made two years later, in March 2021, when a group of parents asked the Victorian government that the Richmond centre be relocated. This followed the discovery of the body of a man outside a

local primary school. On March 25, 2021, The Australian reported that a woman dialled triple-0 after seeing three men rob a drug user as he lay close to death on the ground metres from the Richmond injecting room. The woman said that she could barely sleep or eat since the incident. Parents were asked to direct schoolchildren towards the back entrance of the school so they could not see the white sheet covering the dead body.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/traumatised-mother-dialled-triple0-as-drug-user-outside-north-richmond-injecting-room-lay-motionless/news-story/672e68cc2e9f9997ca4ada2cf1f068ef> One nine-year-old child stated, 'It's kind of scary; I don't really know what's going on at all times. I ask my mum and she says just to stay away and be safe.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/i-saw-the-sheet-over-the-body-parents-call-for-injecting-centre-to-be-moved-away-from-school-20210324-p57dj9.html>

A Greek garage owner in the area has complained of the growing fear and discomfort among residents. In a 2020 interview he revealed that his wife refused to visit her doctor near the corner of Elizabeth and Lennox streets, in the afternoons, when there were more drug addicts on the streets. <https://neoskosmos.com/en/169800/richmond-greek-trader-says-injecting-room-belongs-in-a-hospital/>

Re the capacity of these centres to attract additional drug users into an area, some residents believe this to be the case. One resident stated, 'Due to the number of dealers now there, the competition within them has lowered the cost of drugs and people come from everywhere to take advantage of this.' Another resident stated, 'The injecting centre has concentrated a large part of Melbourne's drug problem into one area. The place is becoming a no-go zone. It feels like the Victorian government has decided that Richmond must bear the entirety of Melbourne's drug problem. It's great that the injecting centre is saving lives, but it is destroying a community.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/it-s-destroying-a-community-readers-have-say-on-injecting-room-20190624-p520pq.html> On April 1, 2019, Stephen Jolly, a City of Yarra Councillor, stated, 'It's brought in a lot of people to the area using drugs more than normal. There are roughly 200 using the facility, another 200 shooting up on the street, buying drugs and sometimes involved in low level crime to finance their habits. The situation on the street is getting worse, not better...It has had a honeypot effect of some kind.'

<https://www.3aw.com.au/honeypot-effect-yarra-councillor-says-safe-injecting-room-has-seen-drug-users-flock-to-streets-of-richmond/> The same claim regarding injecting centres attracting drug users was made in 2018 when it was proposed that an injecting centre be established in St Kilda. The Fitzroy Street Traders Association stated, '[T]he small number of facilities currently proposed could result in a massive compounding of the drug problems within the vicinity of these areas. ... [D]rug users and more particularly, drug dealers, will increasingly be attracted to these few facilities. This will result in a further loss of amenity and trade and a probable increase in crime and community trauma.'

<http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MelbULawRw/2001/23.html> A similar argument regarding a St Kilda facility was made by Andrew Bond, then Liberal Party candidate for Albert Park and City of Port Phillip Councillor. Bond stated, 'Under no circumstances should a facility that would attract more ice users to St Kilda even be considered...'

https://medium.com/@edcook_1690/why-st-kilda-needs-a-medically-supervised-injecting-room-1c9bb51e3433

2. Injecting rooms in built-up areas endanger residents, including children

Opponents of injecting rooms in built up areas claim that aspects of drug taking endanger those who live or work in areas where inject rooms are established.

It has been claimed that the North Richmond Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR) has resulted in a significant increase in crime in the area. In 2019, the Police Association Victoria released the results of a survey of its members working in the precinct which found

that 68 percent of members indicated the trial has impacted their workload day-to-day. Nearly 80 percent of members surveyed indicated that crime had increased around the precinct in which the facility is located since it opened. There has been an increase in complaints from residents and local traders and an increasing feeling among the local community that the area is no longer safe. In all, 62 percent of officer survey participants say that in their experience, crimes against the person have increased, 72 percent say property crime has increased, 69 percent report that drug-related crime has increased and 64 percent say anti-social behaviour has spiked since the trial began. There has been a notable sharp increase in shop stealing and 'theft from a motor vehicle'.

<https://tpav.org.au/news/journals/2019-journals/june/safe-injecting-rooms>

As the police survey reveals, individual residents of the area surrounding the injecting room have indicated an increase in threatening and criminal behaviour. In June 2019, one Richmond woman stated, 'In the past week, I've had to flee the park with my three-year-old because three drug dealers were 'working'. I've been abused on Bridge Road by an ice addict who followed me until I ran into a restaurant with my kids.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/it-s-destroying-a-community-readers-have-say-on-injecting-room-20190624-p520pq.html> Two years later, in March 2021, it was reported

that a 42-year-old man entered a Richmond primary school allegedly carrying weapons including a flip knife and a fork fashioned into a knuckle duster. The school went into lockdown. <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/i-saw-the-sheet-over-the-body-parents-call-for-injecting-centre-to-be-moved-away-from-school-20210324-p57dj9.html> A protest meeting of parents and other community members was subsequently called to demand that the Victorian government relocate the injecting room. One of the parents at the meeting was Neil Mallet, the father of two boys aged 10 and 12 who attended the primary school affected. Mr Mallet said of the injecting centre, 'It's putting lives at risk. And the lives that are now at risk are the lives of four- to 12-year-olds and their parents.' Mr Mallet added, 'We don't have any issue with the service being provided, it just shouldn't be provided where a five-year-old can watch it or pick up a needle.' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-25/parent-concerns-richmond-west-primary-safe-injecting-room/100027572> Mr Mallet concluded, 'The risk to children, the increased risk, and the fact that the school had to be closed twice last week is very wrong, as the authorities must be sufficient to admit that this is wrong.' <https://sydneynewstoday.com/crisis-negotiations-to-address-injection-room-issues/106386/>

Another 20-year resident of North Richmond also complained that the school had gone into lockdown a few days prior when a man 'ran around screaming through the school grounds.'

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-25/parent-concerns-richmond-west-primary-safe-injecting-room/100027572> A woman whose elderly mother lives in the area stated, 'We deserve the answer to the increasing crimes and antisocial behavior that we are now being forced to endure.' <https://sydneynewstoday.com/crisis-negotiations-to-address-injection-room-issues/106386/>

Other opponents of injecting centres being in built-up areas argue that even without armed addicts harassing residents there is the ongoing fear of attack. One female resident stated, 'It is absolutely terrible feeling for me as a human being that it is normal to pass a person laying on the ground, clearly unwell. I am scared he will have a psychotic break and jump on me and I won't be able to protect my boys.' <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/north-richmond-injecting-room-sparks-crisis-meeting/news-story/79897637f43be29b1c025def85f6e9d1> Another parent stated, 'I am too fearful to send my son to school. He has picked up needles when walking to school, he has seen fights, all of it — it needs to stop. This injecting room has been nothing but trouble — it needs to be moved. I'm scared a child is going to get seriously hurt due to the violent people this place

attracts. We are living in fear, constant fear. Our lives matter too.'

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/north-richmond-injecting-room-sparks-fear-among-families/news-story/c08c6e225bacdc9385b7b95573aae149> 3AW radio host Neil Mitchell has argued that the lives of addicts are being unfairly preferenced over the lives of children and their parents. On March 19, 2021, Mitchell stated, 'I've come to accept that a safe injecting facility can work and can save some lives for addicts, but at this stage we're putting the lives of addicts ahead of the lives of the residents and the kids.'

<https://www.3aw.com.au/what-neil-mitchell-wants-to-see-happen-to-the-off-the-rails-richmond-drug-injecting-room/>

3. Injecting rooms in built-up areas reduce land values and damage local businesses

Opponents of a supervised injecting facility being established in a built-up area claim that the centre damages the local community economically. It is claimed that land values decline because new residents do not want to move into the region and so people who wish to leave have difficulty selling their homes for a reasonable price. It is also claimed that the sight of many drug takers and the risks associated with their behaviour makes the area unattractive to shoppers. This is said to be damaging local businesses.

In February 2020 it was reported that North Richmond property values had slumped since the opening of a supervised injecting facility in the area in June 2018. The median house price in the block around the injecting room, bordered by Hoddle, Church, Victoria and Highett streets, dropped from \$1.19 million to \$991,000 in the year to June 2019. The median unit price dropped from \$530,000 to \$447,500. Though the fall occurred during a general property downturn across Melbourne, Real Estate -Institute of Victoria data shows a sharper drop in the value of houses in the streets surrounding the injecting room than in houses across the broader suburb of Richmond. North Richmond's median house price fell 16.5 per cent and the median unit price fell 15.6 per cent. Richmond's median house price fell by 5.4 per cent and its median unit price rose 4.2 per cent. Some real estate agents have claimed that the higher fall in this area was because of the injecting centre. Jellis Craig's Richmond director, Elliot Gill, stated, 'People are generally supportive of it [the injecting centre] but, from a real estate perspective, do you want to live next door?'

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/heroin-scourge-blamed-for-plunging-property-prices/news-story/3947555081a9dc78c316f2c518bce000> In a report published on the Domain Real Estate site on June 30, 2019, one North Richmond resident was quoted as saying, 'I had my son's birthday party and several people just did not want to come. Can you imagine explaining that to your child?' The woman indicated that she believes she would be unlikely to recoup what she paid for her property a few years ago if she were to sell now. She stated, 'It would prove to be difficult. I still have a mortgage and I would struggle to get out from under that mortgage currently.' Another resident who had just sold her house for \$100,000 below her auction reserve price was reported as saying, 'My grandkids don't come around anymore. My daughter says they're not safe in the area... You say that to someone and they say, "just live with it". You can't always live with it.' Another resident commented, 'We're all feeling trapped. Our options are very limited.'

<https://www.domain.com.au/news/north-richmond-residents-live-in-fear-of-injecting-room-but-feel-trapped-unable-to-leave-854001/> It has further been claimed by opponents of locating injecting rooms in built-up areas that these facilities damage local businesses. On November 19, 2019, The Age reported that a rally was being organised by a group of local traders calling for the injecting room in North Richmond to be relocated. David Horseman, the spokesperson for a residents' group campaigning to have the injecting room moved somewhere else said that Victoria Street traders had reported fewer people coming to the precinct since the injecting room opened because increased drug use on the street meant people were afraid for their safety.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/no-danger-not-all-richmond-residents-want-safe-injecting-room-moved-20191119-p53bvww.html> Six months later the feeling among local traders appeared to be the same. In an article published in The Age on July 5, 2020, Meca Ho, who runs a restaurant on Victoria Street and is the president of the local business association, was reported as saying the injecting facility had dramatically hurt traders. Mr Ho stated, 'People don't want to come to Victoria Street because of fear of being harassed... It's not my job every day to be law enforcement. Richmond is a drug dungeon now.' In the first year of the trial between June 2018 and June 2019, support among local traders fell from 48 percent to 41 percent. Traders have complained that the pollution issue has not been addressed and that needles are still being left on the streets.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/work-in-progress-richmond-s-safe-injecting-room-still-divides-two-years-on-20200630-p557ii.html> When the Victorian government proposed in November 2020 to establish a second injection facility near the Queen Victoria Market trader reaction was similarly unresponsive. The Victorian Opposition leader Michael O'Brien stated, 'Market stall holders have said that if the Andrews Labor Government puts in the second drug injecting room next to the iconic Queen Victoria Market, families and tourists will avoid the area.'

The Queen Victoria Market is a tourist icon. Given the increased crime and anti-social behaviour that North Richmond residents have experienced from that injecting facility, it would be madness to repeat this at our beloved Queen Vic Market.'

<https://www.michaelobrien.com.au/labor-must-abandon-second-planned-injecting-room-at-queen-vic-market/>

4. Injecting rooms exaggerate their success

Opponents of supervised injecting facilities argue that these centres do not achieve what they claim and that the relatively small degree of success they attain does not warrant the distress and dislocation they inflict upon local communities.

Critics claim that drug injecting rooms' claim that no drug users die of an overdose inside their facilities is not a sufficient measure of success. These critics claim that it is hardly remarkable that the lives of heroin users are saved in the short term when there are trained medical staff on hand to immediately administer Naloxone, an opioid receptor antagonist medication that can eliminate all signs of opioid intoxication to reverse an opioid overdose.

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/heroin/what-can-be-done-for-heroin-overdose> What these critics claim is more important is what happens to these drug users once they leave the injecting room.

In an opinion piece published in The Age on March 2, 2019, John Pesutto, Victoria's shadow attorney general from 2014 to 2018, stated, 'We know that no one is likely to experience a fatal overdose in a drug injecting facility. Evidence from around the world, including the Kings Cross facility in Sydney, bears that out.' Pesutto went on to state that many users' behaviour and risk of overdose remains unchanged as they go on to take drugs outside a supervised facility. He stated, 'The argument becomes harder when we enquire about what happens to someone who engages the facility but continues to inject at other locations several times each day, especially in more acute cases.' Pesutto explained, 'Evidence submitted to a review of the Kings Cross facility some years ago put that figure as high as 80 per cent for people facing serious addiction [who would inject outside the facility at other times]. Last year, I was told of a tragic story of a parent whose adult child had used the North Richmond facility but then died of a fatal overdose at a nearby location a short time later.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/richmond-drug-injecting-trial-deserves-robust-evaluation-20190301-p5113s.html> Those who adopt Pesutto's perspective argue that

supervised injecting rooms often only achieve a short-term reprieve for those who use them as these drug users then go on to take a fatal overdose somewhere else.

Other critics have made similar criticisms about the Kings Cross injecting room, noting that the Centre's frequent claim that each successful drug overdose intervention is a life saved is not accurate. The Delgarno Institute has similarly claimed that most addicts who used the Kings Cross facility do so for only a small proportion of the doses they take. The Institute stated, 'On average one out of every 35 injections per user was in the injecting room.'

[https://www.dalgarnoinstitute.org.au/images/resources/pdf/injecting-](https://www.dalgarnoinstitute.org.au/images/resources/pdf/injecting-rooms/DFA_Injecting_Room_Detailed_Research.pdf)

[rooms/DFA_Injecting_Room_Detailed_Research.pdf](https://www.dalgarnoinstitute.org.au/images/resources/pdf/injecting-rooms/DFA_Injecting_Room_Detailed_Research.pdf) The Institute further argued, 'In Australia, about 1 in every 100 heroin addicts die each year from heroin overdose. The injecting room would need to host 300 injections per day (that is enough injections for 100 heroin addicts injecting 3 times per day) before they could claim they had saved the life of the one of those 100 who would have died. But the [Kings Cross] injecting room averages less than 200 injections per day, many of which are not even heroin. This is not even enough to claim that they save one life per year.'

https://www.dalgarnoinstitute.org.au/images/resources/pdf/injecting-rooms/DFA_Injecting_Room_Detailed_Research.pdf

It has also been pointed out that not only does every treated overdose not represent a life saved, but further, those treated overdoses do not even represent a fatality avoided in the short term. This is because only a small percentage of untreated overdoses suffered in the wider drug-taking population result in death. Drug Free Australia, a lobby group which opposes harm minimisation strategies as an approach to reducing the impact of illicit drugs in Australia, has made this point in relation to the Kings Cross facility. Referring to data drawn from the official 2003 evaluation of the facility, Drug Free Australia noted, 'The Kings Cross injecting room continually and falsely publicised every overdose in the injecting room as a life that had been saved or "potentially saved". In reality, only one in every 25 heroin overdoses is ever fatal, but the injecting room kept repeating the falsehood regardless, likely for the purpose of swaying public opinion in its favour.'

[https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/book-paper-](https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/book-paper-pdf/Schools%20HM%20Failure%20pages.pdf)

[pdf/Schools%20HM%20Failure%20pages.pdf](https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/book-paper-pdf/Schools%20HM%20Failure%20pages.pdf) Drugs Free Australia have also supported the Delgarno Institute's claim that injecting facilities only alter where overdoses occur; they do not prevent them from occurring in absolute terms. Drugs Free Australia stated, 'Before the injecting room opened, Kings Cross had 12 percent of all New South Wales overdose deaths. After the room opened, Kings Cross still had 12 percent of New South Wales overdose deaths. This means that while there were no deaths from overdoses (imagined or real) in the injecting room, there were just as many deaths on the streets outside the facility despite its presence.'

<https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/book-paper-pdf/Schools%20HM%20Failure%20pages.pdf>

5. Injecting rooms misdirect resources and send the wrong message on drug taking

Opponents of harm minimisation strategies, such as supervised injecting rooms, argue that these approaches are wrong because they undermine the attempts of government authorities to present drug use as harmful and to warn people against taking up drug habits. It is claimed these injecting sites also help to bolster the market for illicit drugs and so encourage drug dealers. Finally, it is argued, that these centres absorb funds which would be better spent on rehabilitation and policing.

Concern regarding mixed messaging and the misuse of resources has been expressed by the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) which has condemned the North Richmond injecting facility as a failure and has opposed the proposed establishment of additional injecting centres at the Victoria Market and in St Kilda. On September 8, 2020, the ACL stated, 'ACL

calls upon the Andrews government to reject calls for an injecting room at St Kilda, abandon its proposed Victoria Market site and close the failed North Richmond experiment. The government should instead send the clear message that illicit drugs are never safe, make drug rehabilitation mandatory for addicts and strongly police street selling.

The City of Port Phillip should reject the St Kilda proposal immediately and send a strong message that illicit drug use is not welcome.'

https://www.acl.org.au/mr_vic_injectingrooms2#splash-signup The ACL had voiced a similar objection three years previously, on March 17, 2017, when it presented a submission to a Victorian Drug Law Reform Inquiry, rejecting the original proposal that an injecting centre be set up in Richmond. The ACL submission stated, 'The establishment of an injecting room in Richmond is a highly irresponsible move which should be rejected. Drug-injecting rooms should not be presented as the solution to high drug use in Richmond or any other suburb in Melbourne. Offering drug-injecting rooms sends the wrong message to people dealing with drug addiction; it sends the erroneous message that the practice can be safe. Drug users often become slaves to their addiction, we should be doing all we can to help them overcome the addiction.'

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lrrcsc/Drugs/_Submissions/181_2017.03.17_-_ACL_-_submission.pdf

The Victorian Liberal Party has also long opposed a harm minimisation approach to illicit drug taking, arguing against approaches which send the message that under certain circumstances the government supports drug-taking. Instead the Victorian Liberals have argued for better rehabilitation services and increased policing. In a media release published on July 13, 2017, the Victorian Liberals stated, 'It sends the wrong message to our kids and effectively says we've given up on preventing drug use. To have Government sanctioned drug taking sends the wrong message to our kids...'

A better approach is helping addicts [rehabilitate], more police on the beat and toughening up our laws to punish parasitic drug dealers and traffickers.'

<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jBcuqLG7sOoJ:https://vic.liberal.org.au/news/2017-07-13/drug-injecting-rooms+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=au>

Victorian Liberal MP, Roma Britnell, a former nurse with experience in drug rehabilitation, explained her reasons for opposing the Richmond injecting centre. 'I...have concerns about the message this sends to the wider community... I am not convinced that the answer [to the problems of drug addiction] is this sort of centre in the format that is being proposed. I do not think it sends the right message to the community at all.' Instead, Britnell highlighted the inadequate funding provided rehabilitation services in her own electorate and argued that this was where resources should be directed. She stated, 'In my electorate we are not immune to drug problems and we face our own series of issues, mostly around the lack of appropriate rehab places and a withdrawal treatment program which is not fully funded and only operates Monday to Friday and not on school holidays or public holidays. This is a critical failing that must be addressed, because you do not withdraw between 9 and 5, you do not have public holidays off when withdrawing and you do not have school holidays off from withdrawing. It needs a 24-hour service because the demand is clearly there... Whilst I know there is support for this injecting room, I cannot help but feel the funding and the focus should be on strengthening other areas of addiction services to stop people becoming addicted in the first place and supporting those who are on the rehabilitation pathway. The workers in the field need resources to assist, and the families beg us to help them.'

<https://romabritnell.com.au/drugs-poisons-and-controlled-substances-amendment-medically-supervised-injecting-centre-bill-2017/>

Further implications

Many of the arguments put against retaining injection centres in built-up areas are in fact arguments against establishing injection centres anywhere. These objections focus on doubts that injecting facilities save the number of lives that are claimed and concerns that they may actually encourage overdoses by giving drug takers the confidence to take larger quantities of drugs. <https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/book-paper-pdf/Schools%20HM%20Failure%20pages.pdf> Other concerns which are raised that also are not affected by the injecting centre's location are concerns that establishing such centres anywhere is a misuse of government funds and in particular a misuse of funds which would be better spent more directly assisting addicts into rehabilitation.

<https://romabritnell.com.au/drugs-poisons-and-controlled-substances-amendment-medically-supervised-injecting-centre-bill-2017/>

However, there are criticisms that do relate directly to where the centre is located. From this perspective, in Australia, the North Richmond centre appears to have attracted far more criticism than the Kings Cross facility. One of the main reasons for this is the location of the North Richmond centre next to a primary school. The primary school principal has not complained that the injecting room has worsened the situation of the school's students; <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/traumatised-mother-dialled-triple0-as-drug-user-outside-north-richmond-injecting-room-lay-motionless/news-story/672e68cc2e9f9997ca4ada2cf1f068ef> however, there are many parents who clearly appear to believe that this is not the case and that their children are being unnecessarily traumatized by having an injecting centre nearby. <https://www.change.org/p/move-the-injecting-room-away-from-primary-school-and-residential-area/u/28751595> The change in position of the former Victorian premier, Jeff Kennett, is an interesting example of the impact of the North Melbourne centre's location on its acceptability to the Richmond community. Mr Kennett is a supporter of supervised injection centres as a way of saving lives and was originally part of the group overseeing this centre. Now he is opposed to its operation and his opposition stems from where the centre is situated. In an opinion piece published in The Herald Sun on March 30, 2021, he stated, 'The current location, next to a primary school in Richmond, is totally inappropriate.' It would appear that if the Victorian government wishes to regain the support of the Richmond community for the centre it will need to place it somewhere that is not adjacent to a sensitive facility like a school. Relocating it anywhere else will be controversial and will be likely to create some opposition from those most immediately affected but having the facility next to a school vastly increases the number of people opposed to its presence. Locating it in a less problematic location would be likely to reduce opposition.

The Kings Cross injecting centre has not provoked the sort of local opposition that the North Richmond centre is now receiving. There may well be reasons for this that extend beyond the fact that the Kings Cross facility is not near a school. The Richmond community survey of local residents and businesspeople conducted immediately before the trial (in June 2018) and again after a year of operation indicated that support for the injecting room in North Richmond fell from 61 to 44 percent among residents and from 48 to 41 per cent among businesses.

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file_uploads/Review_of_the_Medically_Supervised_Injecting_Room_June_2020_WsP785dN.pdf

Part of the reason for this loss of local support is that the community perception in Richmond is that there has not been a clear reduction in the number of discarded syringes littering the local streets. Some residents believe that the amount of drug-related litter has increased. The Richmond centre follows a passive model for the management of drug-related waste on the streets and elsewhere. Residents and others who find discarded injecting equipment around North Richmond Community Health are asked to contact the centre and they will come and

dispose of the items. Similarly, anyone who finds a syringe in a street or park or wants someone to pick up a syringe from their property, can request syringe management services online or by calling the council. <https://nrch.com.au/services/medically-supervised-injecting-room/> This places the responsibility on residents and means that there may well be a significant delay before the waste is removed. Kings Cross, on the other hand, adopts a far more proactive strategy for managing drug-related litter. The Kirketon Road Centre, a primary health care service in Kings Cross, provides a Needle Clean Up service which collects discarded needles and syringes in Eastern Sydney and Darlinghurst, Kings Cross and Woolloomooloo on weekdays. A designated worker collects any injecting equipment discarded in public locations identified as 'hot spots', which are monitored and adjusted when patterns of public injecting change. The majority of hot spots are located within a 500-metre radius of the Kings Cross Medically Supervised Injecting Centre. This means that needles and syringes are actively collected from 'hot spots' without a member of the public first having to request this service. The worker also responds to calls from the public to the New South Wales Needle Clean Up Hotline.

<https://kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/kirby/report/EvalRep4SMSIC.pdf> In Kings Cross, the number of publicly discarded needles and syringes approximately halved after the centre opened and this appears to have contributed to 70 percent of local businesses and 78 percent of residents supporting the centre's existence. <https://adf.org.au/insights/medically-supervised-injecting-centres/>

After the North Richmond centre was reviewed in 2020, the Victorian Government announced a \$9 million investment to undertake neighbourhood renewal and improve the area around the North Richmond facility to alleviate concerns. A more effective means of drug-related litter management will need to be part of this reform or public dissatisfaction is likely to remain.