

Media Release

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NEW NALOXONE PROGRAM TO SAVE LIVES

Directions Health Services and Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA) have launched a new program to make the lifesaving drug Naloxone more broadly available and prevent overdose deaths. The program is funded by ACT Health.

“The latest available data shows that in 2017, Canberra had a higher overdose rate, 7.9 deaths per 100,000 persons, than the national average of 7.1 deaths per 100,000 persons,” Directions Health CEO, Bronwyn Hendry said. “When compared to the rate for metropolitan cities, which was 6.6 deaths per 100,000 persons, the number of preventable deaths in the ACT is significantly higher.

“Opioid overdose deaths are preventable. Sadly, more Canberrans still lose their lives due to overdose than they do on our roads. The program being announced today is designed to save lives and reduce the number of families and friends who must deal with the life-long impact of losing a loved one to a preventable overdose.”

“Naloxone reverses the effects of opioid overdose and can save lives. The ACT has led the way nationally in making Naloxone widely available. In the initial trial, spearheaded by CAHMA, almost 30 per cent of the 200 people trained in administration of Naloxone injections reported they had successfully reversed an overdose, resulting in an estimated 57 lives saved during the evaluation period,” CAHMA Manager, Chris Gough said.

“Up until now, Naloxone has only been available in injectable form, either via a prescription from a GP, attending a CAHMA training session where a GP is in attendance, or over the counter at a pharmacy. “However, many people find the prospect of administering an injection in an emergency situation daunting,” Mr Gough said.

The new Naloxone nasal spray, Nyxoid, has recently become available in Australia and can be purchased over the counter from pharmacies. However, it is not yet listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and is cost prohibitive for most people.

“While the goal of making Naloxone available over the counter was to increase access, issues such as cost have limited the number of people who have this lifesaving drug available when it is needed,” Ms Hendry said.

Over the next six months, Directions Health Services will make Nyxoid available free of charge to people who inject drugs and their families. This will enable clients accessing the Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) outlets in Civic and Woden, and those attending Hepatitis ACT in O’Connor, to obtain Nyxoid over the counter from a nearby pharmacy, free of charge.

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The opportunity to access free Nyxoid will be extended to other sites, including through Directions' mobile health services, to ensure the service can reach as many people at risk as possible.

Training to enable people to recognise the signs of overdose and how to use the Nyxoid nasal spray will be provided to all participants, and data captured on the number of overdoses reversed will be collected. The importance of rescue breathing and calling an ambulance will also be emphasised.

"This is a short-term measure that we believe will help reduce overdose deaths in the ACT, while a more comprehensive longer-term solution is developed by ACT Health," Ms Hendry said. "We thank ACT Health and CAHMA for supporting this program."

Longer term expansion of the ACT Naloxone program was announced in the 2019-20 ACT budget, with \$1.2 million over three years dedicated to fighting preventable opioid deaths.

"Ideally, every member of our community would have Nyxoid in their pocket, handbag or first aid kit and be able to save someone's life with this simple procedure," Ms Hendry said.

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