

TOPIC: That a supervised drug injecting room trial should be conducted in Melbourne

Meet Aaron Short. A 26 year old Melbournian with a loving family. Young and making prosperous plans for the future. His life was perfect, but this was all about to come tumbling down when on one night in August 2015, Aaron experienced a tragic relapse in his addiction to heroin. It was this same drug less than a few weeks later that took his life in a fatal overdose. Heartbreakingly, Aaron joins thousands of other Melbournians who are stuck in hopeless drug addictions with limited resources available to save their lives. So what can be done to even begin to tackle such a calamitous issue? It starts with a trial. A trial for a supervised drug injecting room in Melbourne. If we want to save the lives of helpless victims, offer pathways to detox, reduce criminal activity and protect our community, we must keep an open mind and urge the Victorian government to introduce a trial in Melbourne.

Firstly, a trial for a drug injecting room in Melbourne would save lives. Yes, the inevitable question I'm sure is bound to cross your mind is how exactly could shooting up with illegal drugs be considered safe? But what is safe is the fact that it's a clean facility that provides sterilised needles to stop the spread of deadly diseases such as HIV, not to mention professionals supporting addicts to prevent tragic overdoses. Sounds great, but how can we be sure of these health benefits? We can learn from Sydney's success. A medically supervised injecting centre has been operating in Sydney for 16 years and its achievements in health are beyond belief. It has overseen nearly one million injections. It has managed over 6000 overdoses. It has reduced ambulance call-outs to Kings Cross by a whopping 80 per cent. It has done all this without a single death. Imagine how many lives we could save if the same was reflected in Richmond. It is for this reason that dozens of experts have too, jumped on the bandwagon, seeing former president Jeff Kennett, criminal lawyer Robert Richter, members of the Australian Medical Association and many more all calling for a trial in Melbourne. Can we honestly say that sticking to the status quo is working? Not when we consider statistics released in the Coroner's Court revealing that 477 Victorians died of drug overdose in 2016. The stats speak for themselves. Drugs are killing our community, our friends, our neighbours, and our family. We need a trial to save the lives of those who cannot save their lives themselves.

Moreover, a supervised drug injecting room trial would provide a gateway for drug addicts to consider detox. Although we currently have rehabilitation services available to addicts, they struggle to reach segments of our community. Why? Stigma and vulnerability. The implementation of a trial would overcome this by providing free services, and compassionate, non-judgemental staff who reduce the social humiliation associated with drug use. In addition, it would connect marginalised and disadvantaged victims to vital services like mental health referrals, treatment and counselling. The New South Wales Bureau of Statistics found that 70% of Sydney's clients had never accessed treatment in the past, however pragmatically solved this by distributing 12,000 referrals to vital social services. This would never have been possible without a drug injecting room. In providing these services, we would see addicts with the support they need to fight their addictions.

Whilst Premier David Andrews opposes a trial through fear of an increase in crime, what he fails to conceptualise is the fact that it would take drug users off the streets, in turn having the opposite effect of a reduction in crime. Think about it. Drug users would no longer shoot up in the dirty alleyways along our very own streets and would be attracted to one safe area, which prevents criminal activity by encouraging addicts to be eventually weaned off drugs. Blatant evidence that contradicts Andrew's pitiful argument is the fact Sydney's injecting centre as seen no increase in crime in its surrounding area, according to the Australian

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Bureau of Statistics. Furthermore, how exactly is it encouraging drug use when its purpose is to save lives? It does not provide drugs, it provides clean needles. It would be disappointing as a loyal and devout state that we would not introduce a trial when the only argument against it is one that can't even be supported by proper evidence.

Finally, a trial would protect the community from harm. Richmond is the epicentre for the heroin market, and the problem is not hard to miss when we see filthy and infected needles lying on our very own streets. In a parliamentary inquiry in June, State Coroner Sara Hinchey described a case of a toddler who was stabbed by a needle that was disturbingly left in the tanbark of his childcare centre. If we continue to be ignorant in addressing this issue, it would not be hard to conclude that your child could be next. Not only this, but we are exposing our innocent children to seeing drug addicts shoot up right in front of their eyes. What would we prefer? This or for addicts to be segregated into a clean, medically supervised room? If the threats posing on our children aren't frightening I don't know what is. A drug-injecting room trial in Melbourne will remove threat in our community and keep our vulnerable children safe.

Aaron's mother said he would have still been alive today if he had the support of our health system. Of course, there is no way to completely eliminate drugs, but we can do something to help young people and the rest of the community from the harm they cause. It is our issue, our community and our fight. We, as citizens of Melbourne, must urge the government to introduce a drug injecting room trial in Melbourne, before we see someone we're very close to become the next victim.

