FACT SHEET
naloxone information
for health professionals

overdose in victoria
477 Victorians died of a drug overdose in 2016 – a number that is expected to rise to 500 as investigations are finalised. Victoria’s overdose rate has been steadily rising since 2010, up by almost 40% from 342 to 477.\(^1\)

Between 2010 – 2014, opioids that most commonly contributed to overdose fatalities in Victoria were heroin, methadone, codeine, oxycodone (e.g. Endone, OxyNorm, OxyContin), fentanyl and pharmaceutical morphine – e.g. MS Contin.\(^2\)

In many of these cases someone else was present and could have prevented death if they had naloxone and knew how to use it.

what is naloxone?
Naloxone is a type of medicine called an opioid antagonist which temporarily reverses the effects of opioid overdose. This action lasts between 30 – 90 minutes allowing the person to breathe again while the ambulance is on its way. Naloxone has no effect other than this action and cannot be misused to get high.

how is naloxone supplied?
In Australia, naloxone is supplied as an intra-muscular (IM) injection and is available in a five-pack of one-dose ampoules or as a single five-dose prefilled syringe. Both of these naloxone products can be prescribed by a doctor and attract a subsidy under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Both are also available directly from a Pharmacist without a prescription (unsubsidised).

For examples of naloxone prescriptions go to www.penington.org.au/cope.

how should naloxone be stored?
Manufacturers recommend that naloxone is stored below 25 degrees celsius. However, naloxone is a very sturdy drug and remains effective when stored at temperatures above 25 degrees. This means that people do not have to worry about it degrading to a non-effective level if left in an unrefrigerated or air-conditioned space – such as a cupboard – during hot summer months. Keeping naloxone in the box provided is recommended, to avoid direct sunlight.

References
2. Coroners Court of Victoria 2014.

COPE
**how is it administered?**

Naloxone is injected into a muscle in the upper arm or outer thigh. A second dose can be administered two to three minutes later if there is still no response.

**can naloxone wear off before the drugs that cause the overdose?**

Yes. Naloxone usually wears off in 30 to 90 minutes, and when this happens the person can stop breathing again unless more naloxone is available. This is especially the case if they have taken other depressant drugs as well as the opioids (such as alcohol or benzodiazepines).

**are there risks associated with naloxone use?**

There are very few risks associated with naloxone use. A very small number of people have hypersensitivity to naloxone.

**who can carry or administer naloxone?**

Prescribing naloxone is fully consistent with Victorian and Common-wealth law regulating drug prescribing. It is legal for a person to carry naloxone that is prescribed to them or that they have purchased from a pharmacist. Naloxone is not a controlled substance, nor a drug with any abuse potential. It is legal for a non-medical person to administer naloxone to someone else to treat a potentially fatal overdose.

**is naloxone just a “safety net” that allows opioid users to use even more?**

Research studies have investigated this common concern. They have found that making naloxone available does NOT encourage people to use opioids more. The goal of distributing naloxone and educating people about how to prevent, recognise and respond to overdoses is to prevent disability and death. Other goals, such as decreasing drug use, can only be accomplished if the user is alive.

Penington Institute’s COPE program supports doctors to prescribe naloxone-injectable devices to at-risk patients and potential overdose witnesses (such as their family, friends and loved ones).

The Australian Medical Association is participating in this initiative by being part of its high-level Reference Group, as are Ambulance Victoria and the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine, amongst other organisations.

For more information, to request training or support contact Penington Institute on 03 9650 0699 or go to copeaustralia.com.au