

Media release



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PENINGTON INSTITUTE WELCOMES PROPOSAL FOR ROYAL COMMISSION INTO MENTAL HEALTH

Australia's leading independent drug research, policy and education organisation, Penington Institute, has welcomed the proposed Royal Commission into Mental Health, should Labor win the Victorian state election in November.

Chief Executive John Ryan described the announcement as an important step forward in tackling Australia's rapidly growing number of drug-related deaths.

"The increasing rate of drug overdose in Australia is alarming and unprecedented," Mr Ryan said.

"The number of accidental deaths due to drug use has risen consistently over the past 15 years from just over 900 in 2002 to more than 1700 in 2016.

"Some 15 years ago the number of accidental drug-related deaths and car deaths were roughly the same. By 2016, the number of accidental drug-related deaths were more than double the number killed in car accidents – 1,704 compared to 751.

"Most of the increase has been due to the number of deaths involving prescription opioids such as Oxycodone, morphine and codeine."

Mr Ryan said that middle aged men, people living in regional and rural Australia, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were much more likely to die from an accidental overdose.

Significantly, those with mental health problems made up a disproportionately large number of deaths from accidental overdose.

"One recent study in Victoria indicated that two thirds of those who died from accidental drug overdose had mental health issues," Mr Ryan said.

"We need to shine a light on one of the most important public health challenges facing us today, and a Royal Commission will need to examine the link between mental illness and accidental drug overdose.

"Right now, 68,000 years of life are lost annually in Australia due to accidental drug-related death.

"We have to tackle the problem swiftly and effectively."

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About Penington Institute

Officially launched in 2014, Penington Institute grew out of the work of Anex and its 20 years experience working with people directly affected by problematic drug use. Penington Institute's mission is to actively support the adoption of approaches to drug use that promote safety and human dignity. It does so through: thought leadership, community education, training, research, policy formation and support for the sector.