

Annual Review 2019





Contents

Message from the Chair and CEO	1
International Overdose Awareness Day 2019	2
Maximising community health and safety	3
Maximising individual health and safety	6
Increasing influence through targeted health promotion	8
Driving organisational performance	10

Front cover photograph: Melbourne's Flinders Street railway station illuminated purple to commemorate International Overdose Awareness Day, August 31st, 2019.

Back cover photograph: Melbourne's Bolte Bridge illuminated purple to commemorate International Overdose Awareness Day, August 31st, 2019.

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It is too easy to judge people who use drugs.

Legal or illegal, the misuse of any psychoactive substance impacts us all.

At Penington Institute, we think it is far more productive to prevent and tackle drug use in a safe, effective and practical way.

We focus on promoting effective strategies, frontline workforce education and public awareness activities. Our work has a positive impact on people, health and law enforcement systems, the economy and society.

Our Organisation

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Director, Sentencing Advisory Council, Victoria

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Our Patrons

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AC CBE** (Chief Patron)

**Professor The Hon Dame Marie Bashir
AD CVO**

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Emeritus Professor David Penington AC

Professor Fiona Stanley AC

Message from the Chair and CEO

Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019, released by Penington Institute last August, documents that the number of Australians dying from drug use is still far in excess of the national road toll. Harms from stimulant use are steeply increasing. Arresting increasing numbers of Australians for drug-related offences is not stemming the tide of harmful drug use in our communities.

2019 was a year of many important achievements, both for Penington Institute and for evidence-based drug policy in Australia and internationally.

- The Australian Government launched its \$10 million, three-state *Take Home Naloxone Pilot* in December.
- Nasal naloxone was added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from November, greatly reducing the price of this life-saving medication.
- The ACT legalised the growing, possession and use of small quantities of cannabis from January 31st, 2020.
- There are some signs of hope in North America's overdose crisis, with preliminary statistics for 2018 showing no increase or even a small decrease in drug-related deaths.

2019 will also be remembered as the year that opioids emerged as a mainstream health issue in Australia. There is more research and reporting around opioids and opioid harms than ever before, while Victoria prepares for the introduction of mandatory real-time prescription monitoring in April 2020 and the two-year trial of a Medically Supervised Injecting Room in Victoria continues.

But that prominence has not emerged from nowhere. The increasing salience of opioids and opioid harms reflects the work of Penington Institute.

For years, we have been doing the work that keeps communities safe, healthy and informed about opioids: representing Victoria's Needle and Syringe Programs, directly informing the *Take Home Naloxone Pilot*, organising seminars and conferences and issuing Australia's Annual Overdose Report.

We have played a leading role in this major public health issue and are glad we have been joined by our partners in the drug policy sector, the media and government.

This past year also brought many other successes which further demonstrate our impact and contributions to evidence-based drug policies.

We convened the biggest International Overdose Awareness Day campaign yet, with 874 events taking place in 39 nations. Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019 reinforced its reputation as the most reliable source of information about drug-induced deaths in Australia. We continued making rigorous, evidence-based submissions to the nation's most important drug-related inquiries and developed an innovative information and education campaign including new resources for people who inject drugs and Victoria's harm reduction workforce.

In short, 2019 saw the issues that Penington Institute has been engaged in for many years achieve the national prominence they deserve.

We look forward to 2020 bringing similar success.

Penington Institute could not fulfil its mission without its Patrons, Board, funders, staff, volunteers and advisory committee members. We are especially inspired by the thousands of people who commit their time and energy to creating and participating in International Overdose Awareness Day around the world.

Thank you one and all,

Ms Kathryn Greiner AO, Chair

Mr John Ryan, CEO



International Overdose Awareness Day 2019 event in Manitoba, Canada.

International Overdose Awareness Day 2019

Time to Remember. Time to Act.

A record-breaking IOAD 2019

On International Overdose Awareness Day, people around the world unite to prevent overdose, increase education and reduce stigma.



Impacts and outcomes

- Overdose prevention and response training and the distribution of naloxone.
- The Michigan Legislature being trained in overdose prevention on October 23rd.
- The Victorian Minister for Mental Health, Martin Foley, announcing \$2.2 million of funding to strengthen essential harm reduction services by increasing access to naloxone and Needle Syringe Programs across Victoria.
- The BC-Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors (in Canada) calling on the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of British Columbia, Judy Darcy, to enact an order that provides a legal framework for drug buyers' clubs.
- The EU drugs agency (EMCDDA) launching three new resources looking at overdoses in Europe and interventions.
- The European Network of People Who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD) producing a video campaign and *Naloxone Saves Lives* resources in 10 different languages.
- Mayoral Proclamations in US and Canada.



IOAD KEY STATISTICS

- 874 EVENTS WORLDWIDE**
- 39 PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES**
- 40,000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS**
- 285,000 WEBSITE VISITORS**
- 60,000 ITEMS OF MERCHANDISE SOLD**
- 20,000 DOWNLOADS OF ONLINE RESOURCES**
- 2,550 MEDIA STORIES (Advertising Value Equivalency of \$9.2 million)**
- 73% OF EVENTS RECIEVED MEDIA COVERAGE**

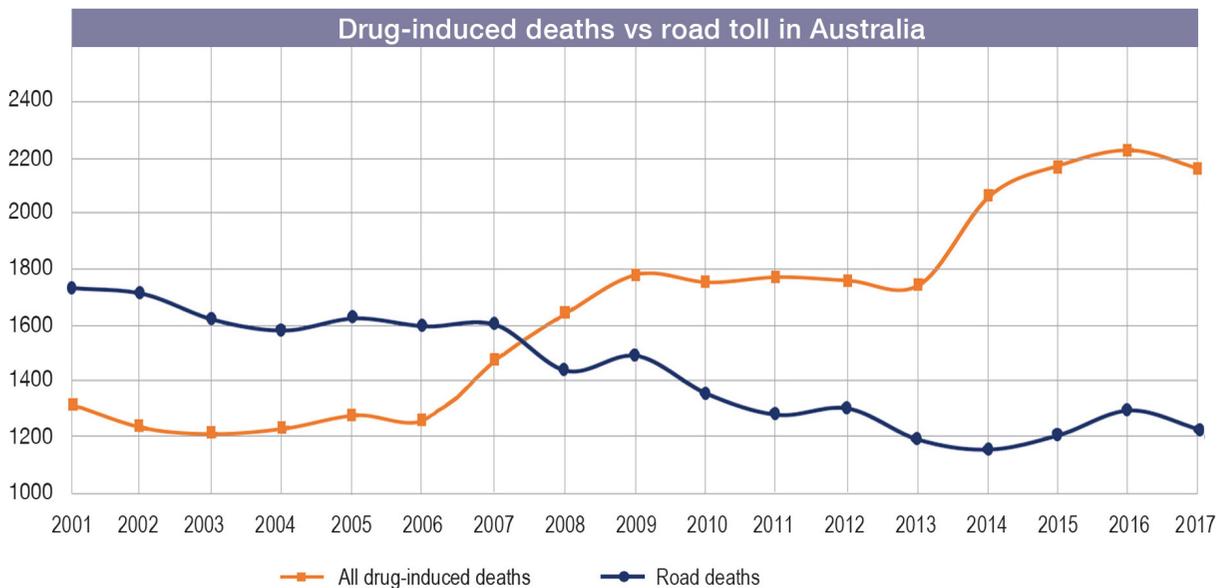
Maximising community health and safety

Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019

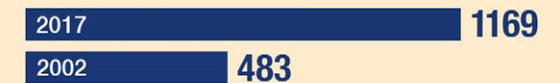
The 2019 report deepened its focus on the geographic, socioeconomic, and age factors which contribute to drug-induced deaths. It also highlighted emerging issues of concern, such as the rising number of poly-substance overdoses (for the first time, more drug-induced deaths were attributed to the presence of four or more substances than to a single drug), and increasing deaths attributable to anti-convulsant and anti-psychotic drugs.

Overall, *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019* found that 1,612 Australians died of an unintentional overdose in 2017. That represents a 55 per cent increase from 2007 to 2017.

Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019 attracted extensive media coverage across traditional and social media, as well as the attention of government, health care and other sectors.



Opioid-related overdose deaths in 2017, compared to 2002



Stimulant-related overdose deaths in 2017, compared to 2002



Maximising community health and safety

Informing policy making

Penington Institute is at the heart of issues around drugs and community wellbeing.

We made submissions to four major commissions of inquiry, including:

- The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, the first of its kind in our nation's history
- NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'
- The Australian Senate's inquiry into the Drug Testing Trial Bill, which would introduce mandatory drug testing, treatment and income management for welfare recipients
- The ACT's inquiry into its Bill to legalise the personal use of cannabis, which took effect on the 31st of January 2020.

These four submissions enabled Penington Institute to share our expertise from the frontline of drug issues, encouraging the adoption of compassionate and evidence-based approaches.



Penington Institute researcher, Dr Rose Crossin.

Evaluation of the Peer-Led Networks trial

The *Reducing Harmful Drug Use Through Peer-Led Networks* trial, funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, has seen six community health organisations around Melbourne develop and trial unique locally-based peer-led programs to reduce the harms of drug use—including overdose—in their local area. Penington Institute has developed the monitoring and evaluation framework and coordinated data collection. We will conduct the final evaluation of the trial in 2020.

Opioid dependence and housing stability

This project, undertaken in partnership with Melbourne City Mission and Launch Housing, and funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust, examined the connection between homelessness and medically-assisted treatment for opioid dependence (MATOD). The research, which involved interviews with 10 staff members from three housing service providers and 25 of their clients, identified how barriers to MATOD impact people experiencing homelessness. The project's forthcoming final report offers recommendations that address these barriers and enable better access to treatment for people with unstable housing.

Cherie Short, mother of Aaron Short, who died of a heroin overdose in 2015:

No one should have to experience the tragic loss of a precious child. By providing and supporting approaches to drug use that promote safety and human dignity, Penington Institute is saving lives.

Kayla Caccaviello, drug and alcohol counsellor and person with lived experience of drug use:

I feel honoured to have been given the opportunity to work alongside Penington Institute and the incredibly necessary advocacy they do for people struggling with addiction. They have allowed me to have a safe space to be my true self, share my story and help positively impact the lives of those in the community.



Cherie Short (left) and Kayla Caccaviello.

Maximising community health and safety

YEAH

Penington Institute's YEAH (Young and Empowered Around Health) program aims to reduce risks for people at a very exciting but vulnerable period of life. Directly empowering young people with knowledge to better navigate risks in relation to sexual health, alcohol and other drug use, YEAH also shares knowledge and lived experience with workers on the frontline.

We have begun developing a Festival Safety Toolkit, a suite of resources to help young people stay safe at music festivals. This work will be completed in 2020.



YEAH has built Australia's largest youth health promotion network.

Mid-term evaluation of the Mansfield RESTART program

The Mansfield RESTART program, designed to reduce drug use and the effects of drug use and addiction within the Mansfield community, evolved from Penington Institute's 2017 policy paper, *A community-controlled approach to problematic ice use*.

Penington Institute and the University of Melbourne's mid-term evaluation of the Mansfield District Hospital's RESTART program found that the program has made significant progress in its first 16 months, with the 90 clients referred to it far exceeding expectations.

RESTART provides localised responses to people seeking help, shorter waiting times for appointments, and accepts all referrals. The program has developed a strong multidisciplinary approach with involvement by different people in the community, including doctors, psychologists, social workers, and police officers – reflecting the many areas of life affected by drug and alcohol problems.

Penington Institute and the University of Melbourne will undertake the final evaluation of the program at the end of 2020.



Penington Institute Deputy CEO, Dr Stephen McNally.



Our ongoing evaluation of the Mansfield RESTART program is helping improve service support for people who use drugs in the community.

Maximising individual health and safety

Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) training

Penington Institute's NSP training helps frontline workers stay connected, informed and up to date.

In 2019, we delivered 42 NSP training sessions to 444 attendees in every corner of Victoria.

In addition to the highly-regarded NSP training sessions, we also deliver opioid overdose response training. These hands-on training sessions assist workers to recognise overdose and respond with the administration of naloxone. The sessions are becoming increasingly popular following the recent addition of nasal naloxone (known commercially as Nyxoid) to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.



Safer Using Series

In 2019, Penington Institute launched its *Safer Using Series*, a set of 18 comprehensive brochures and complementary resources designed to further improve the health and safety of people who use drugs.

The resources represent the latest in evidence-based information to help NSP workers and their clients. The *Safer Using Series* also includes Victoria's first-ever *NSP Handbook* for workers and an *NSP Calendar* full of health promotion opportunities.

As part of the release, Penington Institute delivered 12 *Safer Using Seminars* across regional and metro Victoria to train workers in the implementation of the resources.

Denise (Rustie) Lassam, person with lived experience of drug use:

Penington Institute plays a significant role in our society, forever reminding us, through research, that we need to listen, then act in positive ways to reduce harm for people with addiction.

For me, they have been a trusted guiding light, as I attempt to navigate policies and procedures around addiction that affect my life personally, and speak out when harms are committed.

Anex Bulletin

The *Anex Bulletin* remains the most indispensable source of information for workers in Australia's NSPs.

Penington Institute produced four issues of the Bulletin in 2019. We also conducted a survey of *Anex Bulletin* readers to gauge their engagement with the publication.

The 235 responses overwhelmingly confirmed that the Bulletin makes a big difference to the work of hundreds of NSP workers around Australia, enabling them to stay up to date on the latest drug trends, have more informed conversations and improve the health and wellbeing of their clients.

The decision to continue funding after June 30 is still pending. There have been no editions since then, depriving frontline workers of the insight and development they value so highly from the Bulletin.



Tammy Waters (left) and Michele (Mitch) Segal, NSP coordinators at Directions Health Services in the ACT.

Maximising individual health and safety

NSP Sector Leadership

Penington Institute's leadership in the NSP sector is reflected in our ongoing role as hosts of important network meetings and administrators of the online NSP Forum.

In 2019, we hosted six meetings of the NSP/Primary Healthcare Service, three meetings of the Community Overdose Prevention and Education program and three meetings of the Injecting Drug Issues Network.

2019 also saw the number of active subscribers on the NSP Forum increase by 53 per cent to 909.

Together, this work provides valuable information and support for frontline workers, coordinators and managers who need to know more about topical issues and options to improve services for staff and clients. It also provides platforms for the frontline workforce to engage in important discussion, learn about emerging trends and improve its own practice.

96%

of people who attended NSP training sessions in 2019 agreed that their skills and knowledge about their jobs improved as a result.

98%

said they would recommend the training to a colleague.

Seminar Series

In 2019, we hosted three seminars about important drug-related issues: pill testing, Pregabalin (Lyrica) and responses to overdose deaths in Victoria.

February's seminar *Pill Testing: Life Saver or False Comfort?* addressed concern about drug-related deaths at music festivals. June's seminar *Lyrica: Filling a Pain Gap or Emerging Threat?* highlighted overdose and dependence emerging out of the significant increase in the prescription of anti-convulsant Pregabalin (Lyrica). While in November, the *Overdose and Response in Victoria* seminar delivered an overview of overdose deaths in Victoria, and three Victorian Government initiatives: the Real-Time Prescription Monitoring system, the Medically Supervised Injecting Room trial and the *Naloxone Subsidy Initiative*.

Speakers drew on a wide variety of knowledge including drug policy, clinical research, government, the AOD sector and their own lived experience.

98%

of the 300+ *Safer Using Seminars* attendees agreed the seminars were engaging and well-organised.

96%

of people who attended the *Overdose and Response in Victoria* seminar agreed or strongly agreed that the seminar enhanced their knowledge of the topic.

Supporting the Naloxone Subsidy Initiative

The *Naloxone Subsidy Initiative* (NSI) is a Victorian Government program designed to get the life-saving opioid reversal drug naloxone into the hands of the people who need it most. Since the introduction of the NSI in 2017, more than 7,000 people have accessed naloxone through the program.

Through the NSI, Penington Institute continues to play a crucial role in ensuring that service providers are informed and prepared to set up or expand their naloxone programs, identify those at risk of overdose, talk to clients about overdose, promote overdose prevention tips and recognise and prevent opioid overdoses.



Penington Institute social media graphic used to promote the Pill Testing seminar.

Increasing influence through targeted health research and promotion

International Overdose Awareness Day 2019 promotion and participation

International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) continues to grow and make change for the better. The final total of 874 events held in 39 countries was a new record, surpassing the previous record of 747 in 2018.

In 2019, International Overdose Awareness Day generated more than 2,550 media stories around the world.

Event organisers, the heart of the IOAD campaign, overwhelmingly reported their events were successful. Events attracted participants from all walks of life and organisers reported being motivated by goals including the reduction of stigma, raising awareness of overdose, remembering loved ones and advocating for changes to reduce the impacts of overdose.

We evaluated the campaign and highlighted the many successes in the *International Overdose Awareness Day Partners' Report 2019*.

IOAD event organiser feedback

Our event has generated a lot of people reaching out for naloxone training and fentanyl test strips. We have multiple trainings already scheduled

– Luisa, USA.

Engaging via media

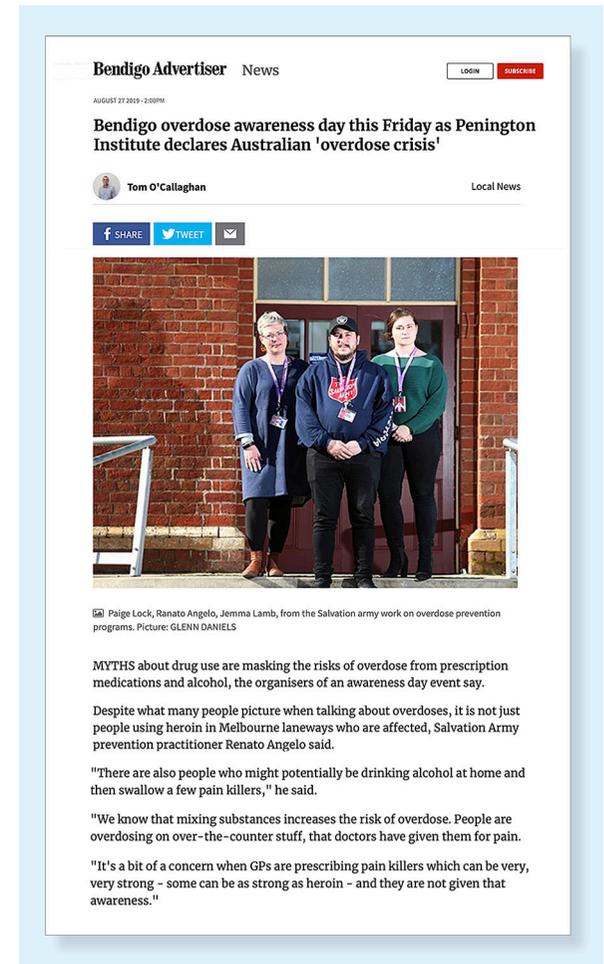
Media enables Penington Institute to reach communities. Some highlights of our 2019 media coverage included the 470 unique media stories generated by *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019*, including front page stories in the *Courier Mail* (QLD) and *West Australian* (WA), widely-circulated online stories on the ABC and news.com.au, industry publications such as the AMA Victoria magazine *VicDoc* and high-profile mentions on television and radio.

Other coverage included three major op-eds by our CEO John Ryan, including a widely-read article published in *The Australian* in October focusing on the costs of our current enforcement-driven approach to cannabis.

We also worked with our supporters to generate media attention, including Kayla Caccaviello, a person with lived experience of drug use. Kayla featured in several media stories including an ABC special investigation into the Tasmanian opium poppy industry and a feature in *The Age* that highlighted her personal story as well as the International Overdose Awareness Day campaign.



Penington Institute CEO John Ryan discussing *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019* on ABC-TV's *News Breakfast*.



The *Bendigo Advertiser* is one of many local media publications which covered IOAD in 2019.

Increasing influence through targeted health research and promotion

Penington Institute’s digital voice in 2019

Penington Institute continued to use its presence on social media to promote evidence-based approaches to drug use in 2019.

Across our major social media channels – International Overdose Awareness Day, YEAH, and Penington Institute – our posts generated 5.5 million impressions, 172,000 engagements (likes, comments and shares) and reached 55,000 followers, a 7 per cent increase on 2018.

The International Overdose Awareness Day website (overdoseday.com) attracted 285,000 unique visitors, a significant increase on 2018. Our IOAD e-newsletter grew its subscribers to 6,142 in 2019.

From this solid foundation, we plan to further grow Penington Institute’s ability to engage our audience and inform the conversation around drugs.



Overdoseday.com

Life Savers

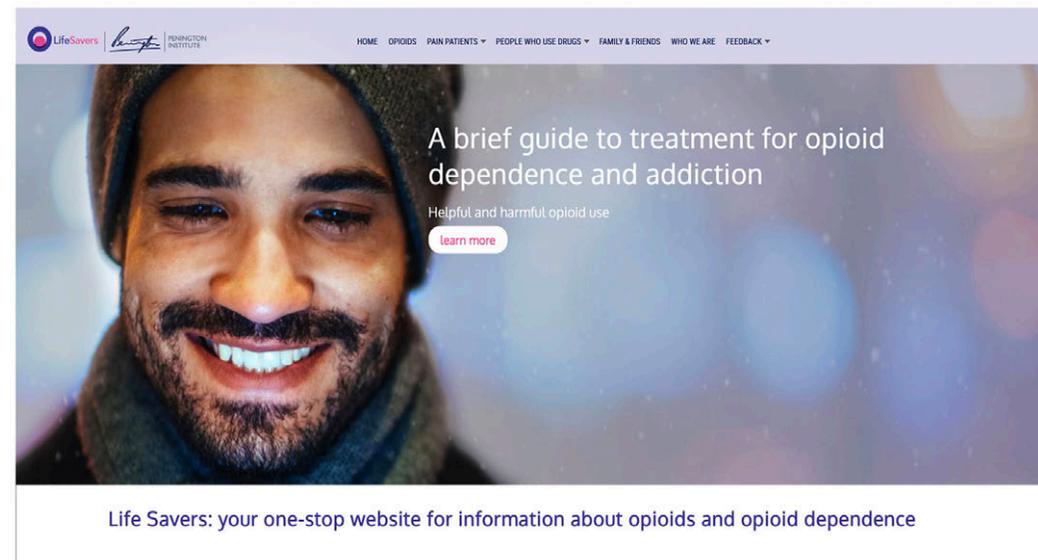
Life Savers, a new Penington Institute website providing information for people who want to know more about the risks and benefits of opioids, went live on Saturday August 31st – to coincide with International Overdose Awareness Day.

Life Savers provides extremely valuable information for people concerned about their own opioid usage and that of their friends and family members. It also recognises the significant medical benefits of opioids, and the importance of maintaining health-care access – including medication-assisted treatment – for people in need.

Penington Institute developed the website following extensive consultation with leading subject matter experts including people with lived experience.

By supporting individuals concerned about their own opioid use, along with the loved ones and healthcare providers who support them, *Life Savers* is poised to play an increasingly important role in our vision of communities that are safe, healthy and empowered to manage drug use.

Life Savers can be found at lifesavers.global.

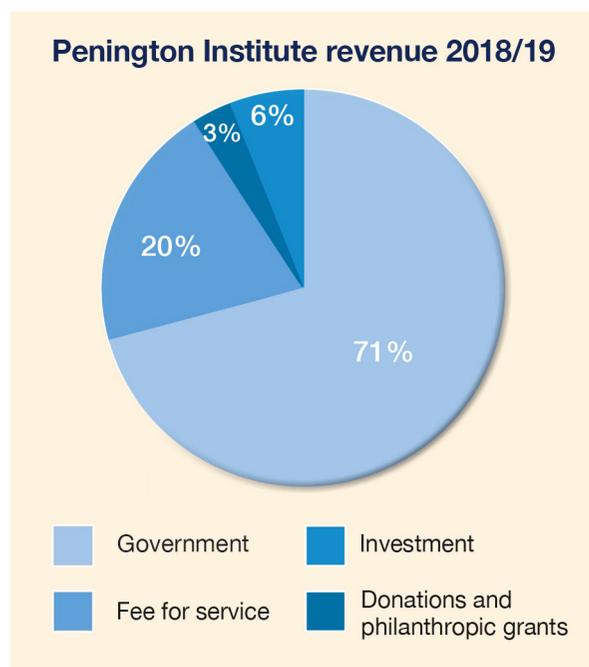


Lifesavers.global

Driving organisational performance

Finance

In 2018/19, Penington Institute generated an income of \$1.58 million from its programs, as well as from its funders and donors, as summarised in the chart shown below.



Penington Institute has strong governance leadership through our Board, with the support of the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Haines Muir Hill externally audits Penington Institute's annual financial statements.

Thank you to our funders and donors

Government

Department of Health and Human Services,
Victorian Government
Department of Health, Australian Government

Trusts and foundations

Bell Charitable Fund
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation

Organisations

Alcohol and Drug Foundation
Camurus AB
Mansfield District Hospital
Piper Alderman
Merck Sharp & Dohme
Switch Nutrition

Major donors

Emeritus Professor David Penington AC

Our heartfelt thanks to our many individual donors and volunteers.

Support our work

The work we have been doing for years aims to save lives and make communities safe, healthy and informed about drug use.

But for Penington Institute to continue maximising our impact, we need your support.

Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2019 is Australia's best source of information about drug-induced deaths. It is also unfunded.

International Overdose Awareness Day is the world's most prominent campaign to end overdose and remember those who have lost their lives. We operate it on a shoestring.

If you believe in our mission of fighting for evidence-based drug policies, connecting lived experience and research and being at the heart of our conversation around drugs – then please consider supporting us financially.

Your support will help us expand our established campaigns and produce new work that will contribute substance and reason to drug issues.

Our impact, over many years, has been profound.

Help us go even further.

