

---

## Reducing harm from alcohol and other drug use

---

### Summary

- Harm reduction means reducing the harm associated with drug use.
  - If your alcohol or other drug use is having a negative impact on your life or your relationships, talk to your doctor or call **DirectLine** on **1800 888 236** for free and confidential support and advice.
- 

For people who use illicit drugs or misuse pharmaceutical medications, stopping is not simple. Harm reduction is about finding ways to reduce the negative impacts of ongoing use.

Harm reduction initiatives are targeted at people who continue their drug use despite the negative consequences, which can include: overdose, relationship breakdowns, isolation, ongoing health issues, unemployment and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Harm reduction strategies are evidence-based public health approaches and specifically focus on providing benefit to the individual and those around them as well as the broader community.

Examples of harm reduction initiatives include:

- needle and syringe programs
- opioid pharmacotherapy treatment
- peer education programs
- diversion programs and caution schemes
- the Medically Supervised Injecting Room
- outreach services.

### Victorian Needle and Syringe Program

The **Victorian Needle and Syringe Program** provides people who inject drugs with access to sterile injecting equipment from various outlets across Victoria, often through pharmacies and community health services.

Easy access to clean needles, syringes and injecting equipment reduces the chance of transmitting blood-borne viruses such as **HIV** and **hepatitis C**.

The Needle and Syringe Program also creates opportunities for people to be provided with information on how to look after their health and wellbeing and to access appropriate drug treatment and other health services.

### Opioid pharmacotherapy treatment

'Pharmacotherapy' is the term used to describe the use of medication (such as methadone or buprenorphine) to assist in the treatment of opioid dependence, most commonly caused by heroin use. Taken on a daily basis, these medications help by managing physical drug dependence, drug craving and compulsive drug use behaviours.

**Opioid pharmacotherapy treatment** is provided by community-based doctors, who provide clinical care and prescriptions, and community pharmacies, which dispense the medication.

### Peer education programs

Peer education programs are highly effective for communicating health promotion and harm reduction messaging to specific population groups, such as young people, people who inject drugs, or cultural groups. Community members are trained and supported to educate their peers on safer ways to use drugs or reduce the negative consequences of their drug use.

---

Generally, people are very receptive to receiving harm reduction education from their peers and are more likely to take that advice on-board. Peer education programs are also particularly effective in getting harm reduction messages to people who are not ordinarily engaged in mainstream health or social services.

For more information on peer support, contact:

- **Self Help Addiction Resource Centre** (SHARC), Tel. **(03) 9573 1700**
- Harm Reduction Victoria, Tel. **(03) 9329 1500**
- **DirectLine**, Tel. **1800 888 236**
- **Youth Drugs and Alcohol Advice** (YoDAA), Tel. **1800 458 685**.

### **Diversion programs**

Many people commit crime to support their drug dependence, so many people who use illicit drugs end up with a criminal record.

Drug **diversion programs** offer drug treatment to people who commit less serious offences that are directly associated with their drug use. This type of program helps people to avoid a criminal record, and gives them the opportunity for treatment.

### **Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **DirectLine** Tel. **1800 888 236** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
- **Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC)** Tel. **(03) 9573 1700**
- **Harm Reduction Victoria** Tel. **(03) 9329 1500**
- Youth Drugs and Alcohol Service (YoDAA) Tel. **1800 458 685**

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Better Health Channel - (need new cp)

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright © 1999/2020** State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.