

MEDIA RELEASE

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Victorian real-time monitoring of prescription drugs an opportunity to address pain

Painaustralia welcomes legislation for Victoria's \$29.5 million state-wide real-time prescription monitoring system introduced into the Victorian Parliament today, but Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett said, **"The new system will curb doctor-shopping and reduce deaths associated with prescription drugs – this is a good outcome – but we need to ensure we don't have more people in chronic pain without the treatments they need and with diminished access to pain medications."**

One in five Australians live with chronic pain and this prevalence increases to as many as one in three older Australians and up to 80% of aged care residents.

Ms Bennett emphasised her support for the new system, but argued, **"This is not just about better monitoring of people with drug addiction. We know that millions of Australians experience chronic pain and use pain killers as a first response. Real time monitoring is an opportunity to better identify people in pain and better meet their needs. But what happens next? You cannot better monitor, better identify needs and then not provide the treatment required."**

Opioids have been prescribed at increasing rates over recent years to reduce pain in people with chronic pain conditions despite the fact that opioids are not an effective solution for pain management where the pain is long-term and not associated with a terminal illness.

Ms Bennett argued, **"Real time monitoring will again highlight the need for urgent access to best practice pain management services. We need to reduce the long waiting lists for access to specialist pain clinics. We need a health workforce trained to assist people in pain, but the professional education being provided as part of the new monitoring scheme seems to focus heavily on drug dependence and overlook the issue of chronic pain."**

Where there is chronic pain, Painaustralia recommends a monitoring system that also includes:

- an alert system to identify patients who have chronic pain and are at risk of addiction;
- ensuring our health workforce is skilled in best-practice assessment and treatment of pain;
- better access to public pain services, particularly for people in regional Australia;
- clear pathways for referral to both addiction specialists and programs as well as best-practice chronic pain support, utilising primary health care as much as possible; and
- an overhaul of our Medicare and private health insurance systems to make ongoing allied health support affordable for people.

Painaustralia emphasised that any state-wide monitoring system must be compatible with the Australia-wide reform announced recently by the Federal Minister for Health Greg Hunt.

Although chronic pain is difficult to treat and may be lifelong, evidence shows that multidisciplinary pain management is the most effective approach for minimising the impact of pain, improving function and quality of life, and avoiding or minimising reliance on painkillers.

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