

Enhancing Access and Equity through Advocacy: Learnings from a peer-run phone service supporting consumers of Opioid Replacement Treatment across Victoria

Daniel Ward¹ and Sarah Lord¹

¹ *Harm Reduction Victoria*

Presenter's Email: danielw@hrvic.org.au

Background: The Pharmacotherapy Advocacy Mediation and Support (PAMS) service is a program of Harm Reduction Victoria, funded by the Victorian Department of Health since 2001. The PAMS service operates a confidential, state-wide, telephone service providing advocacy, mediation, and support, including information provision, education and referral for pharmacotherapy consumers and their direct service providers.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: PAMS works with approximately 10% of Victorian Opioid Replacement Treatment (ORT) service users each year, applying a crisis responsive, problem solving, short-term case management approach. Our guiding objectives are to preserve program continuity, supporting the service users/service provider relationship and increasing access to treatment. As a peer-run service, PAMS is an essential consumer voice in Victoria.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: Through the presentation of case studies and PAMS data we will explore some of the barriers to accessing and maintaining treatment for current and potential consumers of ORT in Victoria. The Victorian system is a community-based model where medical professionals and pharmacists work together to make pharmacotherapy for opioid dependence available in the community.

Victorian ORT consumers and practitioners are faced with specific challenges that impact the quality and availability of care, such as:

- an ageing prescriber workforce faced with an increase in demand for ORT,
- access limitations to ORT in parts of Victoria,
- limitations to consumer treatment choice particularly in relation to the introduction of Long-Acting Injectable Buprenorphine (LAIB).

Conclusion and Next Steps: The presentation will explore how these barriers and structural limitations both maintain and sometimes exacerbate experiences of stigma and discrimination for Victorian ORT consumers, and the way this discrimination is further heightened for incarcerated consumers exiting prison.

Implications for Practice or Policy: We will present a range of possible solutions that have been proposed to address some of these structural barriers, as well as their broader implications toward policy development on a state and national level.